

FirstGlimpse™

Thin Is In

With Altec Lansing's sleek new iM500, your iPod nano never sounded so good. Find out more about this awesome gift idea on page 30!



iPods, Digital Cameras, HDTVs: Gift Ideas Galore

Must-Have HDTV Features

2006's Best Digital Camcorders

December 2006
\$3.50 U.S. • \$4.99 Canada



Online threats change. Now your protection does too.

 Windows®
XP Home / XP Pro
Eligible for a free Windows Vista® compatibility update*

Norton Internet Security™

2007

Includes:

- Norton AntiVirus®
- Norton® Personal Firewall
- Norton® Antispyware
- Norton® Antiphishing

Stay protected from the latest online threats

- ✓ Blocks online identity theft
- ✓ Detects and eliminates spyware
- ✓ Removes viruses and Internet worms
- ✓ Protects against hackers

1 Year Protection for up to 3 PCs
(See top for details)

PC WORLD
Best BUY PC World U.S.
July 2006
Norton Internet Security® 2006

We protect more people from more online threats than anyone in the world.  symantec™



Stay protected from the latest online threats.

What Does Norton Internet Security™ Protect?

From the moment you install it, you're getting protection from the latest online threats. Norton Internet Security is always running in the background to detect and block spyware, viruses, worms, crimeware, and other security risks. It also protects you from phishing Web sites designed to steal personal information. The smart two-way firewall blocks hackers from breaking into your computer and stops spyware from transmitting information over the Internet. And no matter where you connect online, your security settings are optimized to give you maximum protection.



Norton Internet Security™ 2007 automatically protects you from the latest online threats including spyware, viruses, worms, phishing Web sites, and hackers, before they can cause harm. For more information, visit www.symantec.com.

Stay protected from the latest online threats

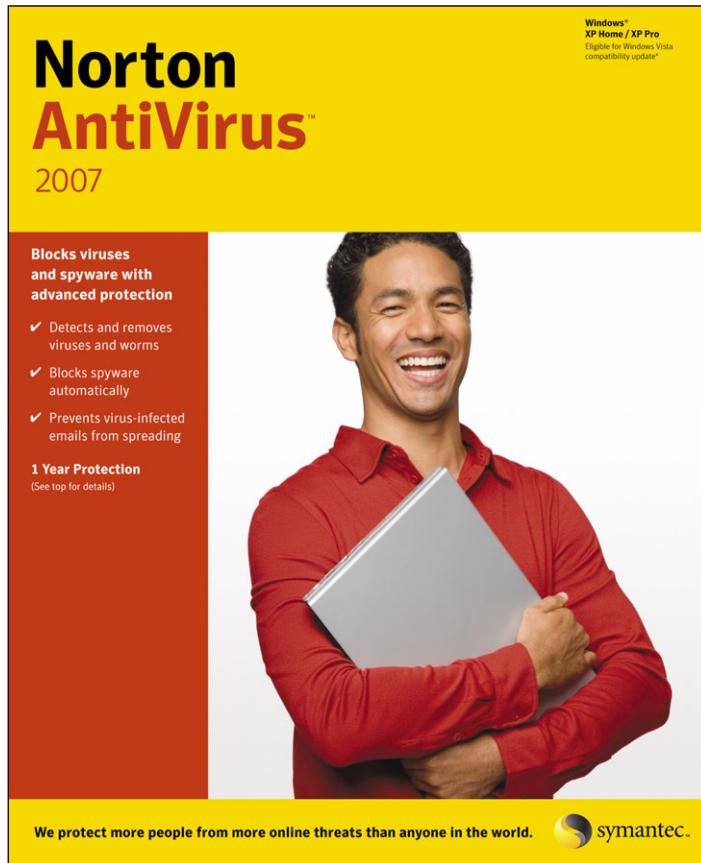
- Blocks online identity theft
- Detects and eliminates Spyware
- Removes Viruses and Internet worms
- Protects against hackers

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We protect more people from more online threats than anyone in the world.

 **symantec**™

Block viruses and spyware with advanced protection.



The image shows the front cover of the Norton AntiVirus 2007 software box. The top half is yellow, featuring the product name 'Norton AntiVirus™ 2007' in large, bold, black and red text. Below the name is the year '2007'. The bottom half is red. On the left side of the red area, there is a vertical list of features: 'Blocks viruses and spyware with advanced protection', 'Detects and removes viruses and worms', 'Blocks spyware automatically', and 'Prevents virus-infected emails from spreading'. Below this list is a small note: '1 Year Protection (See top for details)'. To the right of the text is a photograph of a smiling man in a red shirt holding a silver laptop. At the bottom of the box, a yellow bar contains the text 'We protect more people from more online threats than anyone in the world.' followed by the Symantec logo and the word 'symantec'.

Norton AntiVirus™ 2007 blocks viruses and spyware with advanced protection. It automatically detects and removes viruses, spyware, unwanted adware, and Internet worms, and provides protection updates. For more information, visit www.symantec.com.

Blocks viruses and spyware with advanced protection

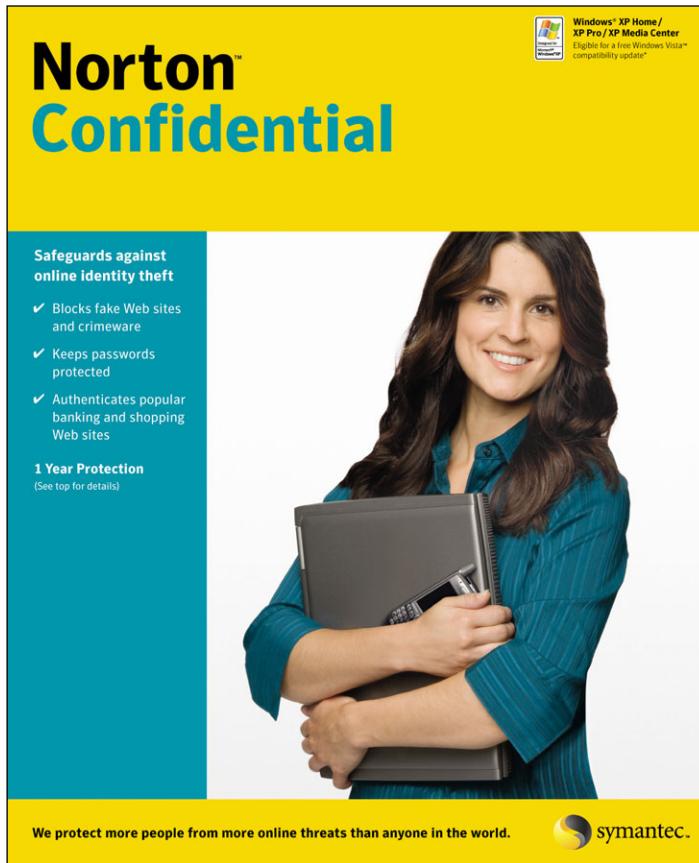
- Detects and removes viruses and worms
- Blocks spyware automatically
- Prevents virus-infected emails from spreading

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We protect more people from more online threats than anyone in the world.

 **symantec™**

Safeguard against online identity theft.



Windows® XP Home /
XP Pro / XP Media Center
Eligible for a free Windows Vista®
compatibility update*

**Norton™
Confidential**

Safeguards against online identity theft

- Blocks fake Web sites and crimeware
- Keeps passwords protected
- Authenticates popular banking and shopping Web sites

1 Year Protection
(See top for details)

We protect more people from more online threats than anyone in the world.  symantec.

Norton™ Confidential safeguards against online identity theft, protecting your confidential information from fraudulent phishing Web sites and crimeware before login, purchase, or any online interaction. For more information, visit www.symantec.com.

Safeguards against online identity theft

- Blocks fake Web sites and crimeware
- Keeps passwords protected
- Authenticates popular banking and shopping Web sites

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We protect more people from more online threats than anyone in the world.

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Lifestyle Close-Up:

Holiday Gift Guide

The holidays are right around the corner, and what better gift than the gift of CE? This year's holiday shopping guide will let you find that perfect something for everyone on your list—no matter what your budget is. From a big, beautiful HDTV to a minuscule USB flash drive, we show you what your kids, spouse, and parents will love to find in their stockings this holiday season.

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Find The Perfect Gift

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Cover Story

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Altec Lansing's inMotion iM500
Speakers For Your nano

On Our Cover:

Featured on our cover this month is the Altec Lansing iM500 (\$129.95; www.alteclansing.com).

Open

There's always something new, interesting, and stylish happening in the world of consumer electronics. That's why the Open section packs the latest news and trends into the first few pages of *First Glimpse*, along with the sparkle and bling that you can buy to accessorize your devices.

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A/V Club

Some of our favorite electronic gadgets are the ones that provide the sounds and pictures that move and entertain us and our friends and family. Whether you want to put together a wireless audio system for your home or just want help using the plasma TV in your living room, A/V Club can help.

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Digital Studio

Digital cameras and camcorders are changing the way we record the moments of our lives, from quick snapshots of favorite vacation spots to priceless video clips of first steps and other important milestones. Get to know your new digicam or camcorder and learn what to do with your photos and video once you have them.

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CE @Home

The consumer electronics in our homes are no longer limited to TVs and DVD players. Smart appliances, home automation, and whole-house audio systems are becoming more and more common and affordable for families, and with so much available, why check CE at the door?

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Protect Your Laptop Computer

CE Lite

Most CE devices are all about fun. Here, we'll tell you about the latest albums and films to catch, so you can make sure your entertainment is as up-to-date as your gear. And, because we all know that kids are often hard to buy for, we show you our top picks for holiday gifts for the little ones.

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Editor's Note

I think a record was set this year: I saw holiday decorations for sale in stores in September, right after Labor Day, a few days after the kids started their new school year, a full four months before the holidays are traditionally celebrated. Lots of folks will sigh and groan that extending the holidays so early leads to the demise of what the season is all about, but I say it lets us get a head start on what, to me, is one of the most fun and most special parts of the holidays: shopping for gifts. I enjoy fretting and fussing over searching for perfect presents, so the extra time lets me scour the stores for everyone on my list.

It's around the holidays, too, that I reflect on how lucky we are to live in an age where cool CE devices, like MP3 players, HDTVs, and digital cameras, are, in general, getting more and more inexpensive, even though their features and quality are getting better and better. We're lucky because not only are they a smarter, more affordable investment for ourselves, but they make awesome gifts, too. With this combination of quality, value, and coolness, you really can't go wrong this holiday season when you buy for your friends and family.

Remember that most retailers have amazing sales on Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving), so if you've had your eye on something in particular, check sales flyers—you're sure to find a bargain (or five).

Live well, friends.

Katie Sommer
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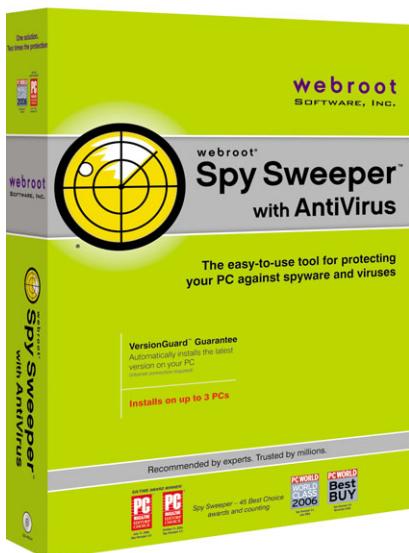
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First Glimpse Special Product Section

This special product section is produced in partnership with leading consumer electronics manufacturers and allows us to provide readers with the most timely product information possible. Browse through these First Glimpse pages to learn about the latest hot products.

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Transform Your Flat-Panel TV Into a True Home Theater

From Vitaphone to THX, from hi-fi to Dolby® Digital, from Woodstock '69 to Clapton '06, JBL loudspeakers have been stealing the show in the professional audio world for more than 60 years. Now JBL is set to steal the show in one of the most exciting venues of all: your home.

If you're shopping for a flat-panel TV, be sure to get a demonstration of the difference JBL surround sound makes. You won't believe your ears.

Did You Know?

- All HDTV programming is broadcast with Dolby Digital sound.
- All DVD players, most cable and satellite programs, and most gaming systems feature multichannel sound.
- You must have a quality surround sound system to enjoy the full impact.

JBL brings its legendary Pro sound home, with powerful, accurate audio for movies, music, sports, and video games. The compact JBL SCS300.5 Theater Pack and Sub10 system is built to play loud and long, delivering a clean, distortion-free performance that will transform your viewing experience. Go ahead, ask for a demonstration and hear the difference for yourself.

Show-Stealing Technologies

JBL SCS components feature advanced technologies derived directly from JBL Professional equipment.

Better Imaging

Originally developed for professional LSR studio monitors, JBL's proprietary EOS waveguides evenly disperse high frequencies, delivering a 360-degree soundscape, encompassing a wider listening area.



FirstGlimpse™

Special Product Section



**JBL SCS300.5 Theater Pack (\$449) &
JBL Sub10 (\$329)**
www.jbl.com
Available at select Best Buy™ stores and
www.bestbuy.com

**STEAL THE SHOW.
GO PRO.™**

Greater Accuracy

An extremely thin, yet extremely rigid titanium dome—reinforced with a foil laminate—ensures accurate, undistorted high-frequency response, even at realistic (meaning loud) listening levels.

Tighter Bass

The computer-optimized geometry of JBL's bass reflex port extends deep bass response, while eliminating unwanted turbulence.

Experience The Excitement

Get a firsthand demonstration of JBL Pro sound, and then do the only logical thing—steal the show.

Powerful Yet Compact

JBL's SCS300.5 system features four identical satellites with dual 3-inch midrange drivers and a voice-matched center channel speaker, for crisp, distinct dialogue. All are video-shielded for safe use near your TV, and all can be wall-mounted (both wall brackets and shelf stands are included, and floor stands are available). The 10-inch, 150-watt powered subwoofer pounds out the deep, distortion-free bass that's an essential part of today's most exciting movie soundtracks.

JBL SCS systems deliver the kind of realistic reproduction of movies and music that professionals insist on. Hollywood has always trusted JBL. Now it's your turn.

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JBL Radial
MSRP: \$299.95
www.jbl.com
Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



Get More From Your iPod®

Home theater isn't the only thing JBL does best. Over the last few years, JBL has become a major manufacturer of award-winning loudspeaker systems for iPods, computers, and other multimedia devices. Check out these and other innovative JBL systems while you're in the store today. They're small. They're cool. And they're pure JBL.

JBL Radial
MSRP: \$299.95
www.jbl.com

JBL Radial delivers clean, powerful, high- and midfrequency sound—and plenty of deep, distortion-free bass—from a compact device with almost unlimited versatility. As a music system, JBL Radial stands alone. As a computer peripheral, it replaces (and seriously upgrades) your external speakers and subwoofer. And as a multimedia entertainment center, it even sends your iPod's photos and video to a TV monitor. However and wherever you use it, it is sound quality that sets JBL Radial apart.

Other Features Include:

- True 2.1-channel sound system

- Four Odyssey® drivers and a subwoofer deliver superior dynamics with astonishingly accurate bass
- iPod Universal Dock
- Stereo mini jack connection to virtually any electronic device
- Advanced transducers for superior audio performance
- Omnidirectional RF remote for full iPod navigation
- One-touch volume and muting controls
- Available in white or black

JBL On Stage® Micro
MSRP: \$99.95
www.jbl.com

It's not much bigger than a standard iPod dock (it actually fits in the palm of your hand), but it delivers legendary JBL audio performance. And it's AC- or battery-powered to go with you



JBL On Stage* Micro

MSRP: \$99.95

www.jbl.com

Available at select Best
Buy™ stores and
www.bestbuy.com



**STEAL THE SHOW.
GO PRO.™**



JBL Radial Micro

MSRP: \$149.95

www.jbl.com

Available at select Best
Buy™ stores and
www.bestbuy.com



anywhere. As a standalone iPod music system, JBL On Stage Micro fills your room with accurate, full-spectrum sound. Connected to your computer, it upgrades your speakers, keeps your iPod charged and in sync, and frees up a ton of desk space. Never before has something so small been quite so entertaining.

JBL Radial Micro

MSRP: \$149.95

www.jbl.com

Rich, Full-Spectrum Sound

It's an iPod party machine with legendary JBL sound. It's a space-saving, all-in-one computer sound system and iPod docking station—again, with legendary JBL sound. Connected to a TV, it's an iPod slideshow and video player with, well, you get the idea. JBL Radial Micro is one of the smallest and most versatile multimedia speaker systems ever developed. And wherever and however you use it, it's among the best-sounding systems out there. Experience clean, accurate,

full-frequency sound and tight, distortion-free bass from a compact device that looks great anywhere.

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Special Product Section

Webroot® Spy Sweeper™ with AntiVirus
MSRP: \$49.95
www.webroot.com
Available at select Best Buy™ stores
and www.bestbuy.com

webroot SOFTWARE, INC.

webroot® Spy Sweeper™ with AntiVirus

The easy-to-use tool for protecting your PC against spyware and viruses

VersionGuard™ Guarantee
Automatically installs the latest version on your PC
(Internet connection required)

Installs on up to 3 PCs

Recommended by experts. Trusted by millions.

SIX-TIME AWARD WINNER!
PC MAGAZINE EDITORS' CHOICE July 17, 2006 Spy Sweeper 4.0
PC MAGAZINE EDITORS' CHOICE October 31, 2005 Spy Sweeper 4.0

Spy Sweeper - 45 Best Choice awards and counting

PC WORLD WORLD CLASS 2006 Spy Sweeper 4.0
PC WORLD Best BUY Spy Sweeper 4.0 November 2005

Keep Your PC Spyware- & Virus-Free With One Click

Spy Sweeper™ with AntiVirus software features a powerful combination of award-winning anti-spyware and antivirus technologies. With just one click, Spy Sweeper™ with AntiVirus software quickly scans your PC and removes any harmful spyware, viruses, Trojans, worms, and rootkits. Plus its Smart Shields are always active and standing guard to keep your system safe from outside threats.

Spy Sweeper™ with AntiVirus is simple to set up and customize and makes your computing life easier with:

- Complete spyware and virus protection in one tool
- Free automatic program and definition updates for one year so your protection is always up-to-date



- Free customer support via phone or email for one year so you can speak with an expert when you need help
- Spy Sweeper™ with AntiVirus is armed with Webroot's Comprehensive Removal Technology, which scours deeply to destroy the most stubborn and malicious spyware and viruses. It is also backed by Webroot's threat research

system, which searches the Internet 24 hours a day, seven days a week for new strains of malware.

webroot
SOFTWARE, INC.



Pinnacle PCTV HD Pro Stick

MSRP: \$129.99

www.pinnaclesys.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



Introducing Pinnacle PCTV HD Pro Stick

Pinnacle's PCTV HD Pro Stick provides everything you need to turn your PC into a digital TV with fully functional DVR. It lets you view and record true over-the-air HD content for free with a device as small as a standard USB thumb drive. The PCTV HD Pro Stick also supports analog NTSC signals from most any analog video source (cable, satellite, and consumer devices like DVD and VHS players).

The package includes a USB 2.0-powered TV tuner with integrated IR (infrared) receiver and a Pinnacle MediaCenter IR mini-remote. The PCTV HD Pro Stick also includes features like direct-to-DVD recording and full support for taking your favorite TV shows on the go with

mobile devices (such as a Sony® PSP™ or an Apple iPod®) through direct recording.

If you have Windows Media Center Edition on your laptop or PC, don't worry—the PCTV HD Pro Stick will still work. This combination lets you watch live TV and gives you all the great features of a fully functional DVR, including an EPG (Electronic Program Guide). All of this, and there is absolutely no new software to learn. The PCTV HD Pro Stick is a must-have for anyone that wants to get a taste of HD quality content for a fraction of the price of an HDTV. It is also an attractive solution for Windows Media Center Edition users who did not purchase a TV tuner with their systems.



Favorite Features Include:

- Live, standard- and high-definition TV on your laptop without service fees
- Ultra-compact tuner fits in a shirt pocket
- Full remote control access
- Full support for both analog (NTSC) and digital (ATSC*) reception
- DVR from your PC
- Integrated EPG (Electronic Program Guide)
- Support for iPod, PSP, and DivX
- Includes mini-remote, high-gain telescopic antenna and analog capture connector

* ATSC, the new digital broadcast standard, is now available in many areas of the United States. ATSC reception is dependent on many factors. The provided antenna will allow reception in areas where there is a good ATSC signal. In regions or rooms where the signal is not strong, an amplified rooftop antenna will be required. It is generally not possible to receive an ATSC signal while en route (e.g. in a car or train). Please consult with your local reseller or go to www.antennaweb.org for more information on areas covered and optimizing your reception.



pinnacle
A division of **Avid**



iHome iH36 (Under Cabinet iPod Stereo)

MSRP: \$199.99

www.ihomeaudio.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and

www.bestbuy.com



**iHome iH30
(iPod Boom Box)**
MSRP: \$149.99
www.ihomeaudio.com



Move & Groove To Your iPod

iH36 (Under Cabinet iPod Stereo)

iHome is ready to outfit spaces of any size with one of its most advanced offerings to date, the iH36. The unit fits snugly under a cabinet and has a host of features including rich, powerful sound; the ability to charge and play all iPods; FM, TV, and Weather channels; timer; remote control; and a 3-line display that shows song title and track number.

iH30 (iPod Boom Box)

With its big sound that won't hurt your wallet, the iH30 is the ultimate boom box for your iPod. Featuring 4-inch speakers that emit powerful sound; a car adaptor that lets you use it on the road; and a battery option for portable use, the iH30 is perfect for the beach, the boardwalk, or the bedroom.

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Special Product Section



iHome iH26 (Portable Travel iPod® Music System)

MSRP: \$99.99

www.ihomeaudio.com

iH26 (Portable Travel iPod® Music System)

With its sleek design, protective carrying case, and host of features, the iH26 is the ultimate portable alarm clock for your iPod. Its built-in docks allow you to charge both the iPod and iPod shuffle simultaneously. Perfect for business trips, camping, picnics, or any family getaway, the iH26 brings high-quality sound and alarm features wherever you go!

iHome
the home system for your iPod®

FirstGlimpse™

Special Product Section

**NETGEAR RangeMax NEXT
Wireless Router**
MSRP: \$129.99
www.netgear.com
Available at select Best Buy™
stores and www.bestbuy.com



Extend The Possibilities Of Your Wireless Home

What is RangeMax NEXT? It's a router that extends the possibilities of your wireless home network by providing a steady stream of up to 270Mbps and is compliant with draft 802.11n. This next-generation wireless standard utilizes advanced MIMO (Multi-In, Multi-Out) technology, which delivers incredible speed and range and, for the first time, provides wireless interoperability at the highest speeds with other products with Intensi-fi™.

A RangeMax NEXT wireless network creates and maintains stable connections and enough bandwidth to surf the Internet, download MP3s, make Internet phone calls, share files, play network games, and stream high-definition videos, simultaneously at any distance or location in the home or office. Because RangeMax NEXT is compatible with all legacy b and g wireless products, you are sure to be connected.

Preset internal antennas and draft 11n-True-Test high-performance testing and tuning, provides maximum performance and high-quality streaming every time. Setup is simple thanks to NETGEAR's Smart Wizard and 24/7 technical support.

NETGEAR®



Take
It
Personally.

Actual Size
2.32" x 3.35" x 0.74"



Mio DigiWalker™ H610

Handheld Personal Navigation and Digital Entertainment Device

The Mio DigiWalker™ H610 is a truly *personal* navigation device and media player - *personal* because its about the size of a cell phone; *personal* because it has separate navigation modes for walking, biking and driving; and *personal* because it lets you enjoy hundreds of your movies, photos and tunes as it helps find your destination. So, pick up an H610 from a retailer near you and *Take It Personally*, wherever you go.


It's where you're going.



H610

C310x

C710



COMPILED BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

Rand McNally Releases First GPS Device

Famed map maker Rand McNally has jumped into the GPS device market with the release of its GPS Navigator (\$499.99; www.randmcnally.com). The USB-enabled device comes loaded with maps of the United States, Canada, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico, plus 26 Best Of The Road trip itineraries with suggested locales for sight-seeing, shopping, and dining. It features a Go Home button, which can steer drivers home from any location, and automatic rerouting if you miss a turn.

The Navigator, which has a 3.5-inch color touchscreen that shows 2D and 3D displays, also works as an MP3 player. Each device ships with a Li-Ion battery, vehicle charger, windshield mount, USB cable, and the published *Road Atlas and Travel Planner*.



Inventors File For Patent Application On Dual-Format HD Disc

Three employees with Warner Brothers—Wayne M. Smith, Alan Bell, and Lewis S. Ostrover—have filed for a patent application on the “multilayer dual optical disc,” which stores both BD (Blu-ray Disc) and HD DVD content on separate layers by using reflective films. The

disc also holds a third layer of data in either the standard CD or DVD format on the other side.

Both the BD format, supported by Sony, and the HD DVD format, backed by Toshiba, use a blue-indigo laser beam to read and write

discs. However, data is written on BDs 0.1mm from a disc's surface and 0.6mm from the surface of an HD-DVD. The patent filers say their disc would let the lasers read the top layer but also “see through” that layer to the bottom layer by employing reflective films.

The hybrid disc may help alleviate some of the competition between the HD disc formats, which could otherwise eventually force consumers to choose one format over the other and movie studios to release films in both formats.

Best Buy Digital Music Store

The recently launched Best Buy Digital Music Store (www.bestbuy.com/digitalmusicstore) is the result of a partnership with Best Buy, Real Networks, and SanDisk. It launched in mid-October with a track from Diddy's new CD, "Press Play," available only through the Best Buy Digital Music Store for a couple of days before the CD's release.

Real Networks Rhapsody music service 4.0 provides the musical content via single-song downloads (99 cents per song) or its subscription service (\$14.99 per month for unlimited songs). Although you can download music from Rhapsody to a computer or another MP3 player, SanDisk has optimized its Sansa e200R Rhapsody MP3 player to fully integrate with the Rhapsody service. When you buy a new Sansa e200 or e200R, you'll get a free, 2-month subscription to the Best Buy Digital Music Store.

The Sansa e200R (2GB, \$139.99; 8GB, \$249.99) plays audio and video; stores still photos; has a digital FM tuner and built-in microphone for voice recording; and features a microSD expansion slot for additional storage capacity.



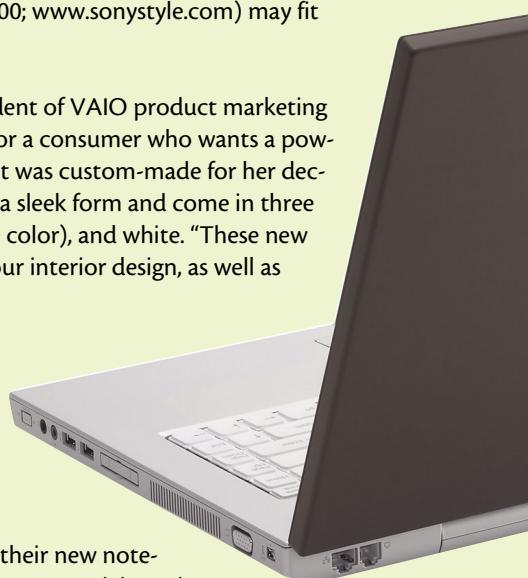
VAIO N Series Notebooks Designed With Home Décor In Mind

If you want a notebook with function and fashion, then one of the new Sony VAIO N Series notebooks (\$1,000; www.sonystyle.com) may fit your needs.

According to Mike Abary, vice president of VAIO product marketing for Sony, the N Series was designed for a consumer who wants a powerful computing tool that looks like it was custom-made for her decorative palette. The notebooks have a sleek form and come in three colors: black, Wenge brown (a coffee color), and white. "These new notebooks are designed to accent your interior design, as well as your life," Abary says.

The N Series has a 15.4-inch widescreen display, an 80GB hard drive, DVD burner, Windows XP Media Center, two USB ports, and wireless connectivity.

Customers who want to personalize their new notebook, either the N Series or another VAIO model, can have it engraved with their names through SonyStyle.com.



Holiday Sales Of CE Devices Expected To Surpass Last Year's Levels

The NPD Group (www.npd.com) is predicting a robust holiday sales season for several CE device categories, including flat-panel TVs, MP3 players, and notebooks and related items, such as laptop bags and video cards.

During the 2005 holiday shopping season, LCD and plasma TVs generated sales of more than \$744 million, an amount The NPD Group thinks will be exceeded this year due to lower prices and a greater choice of models on the market. Similarly, MP3 players accounted for \$497 million in sales last holiday season, a level that should be surpassed this season.

In addition, The NPD Group expects next-generation DVD players—the HD DVD and Blu-ray Disc players on the market this holiday—will sell out this season, even though price tags on these items are still high.

"Consumer technology has seen overall growth all year with mid-year sales increasing almost 5% from 2005 and back-to-school spending up over 6%," says The NPD Group's Stephen Baker, vice president of industry analysis. "We expect that trend to continue from the time the sales start on Black Friday right up until the stores close on Christmas Eve."

Despite Growing Competition, TV Viewing Is On The Rise

Even though consumers can get video content on devices such as iPods, cell phones, and notebook computers, traditional TV viewing continues to climb, according to Nielsen Media Research.

During the 2005 to 2006 TV season, which ended Sept. 17, the total average time a household viewed TV each day was eight hours, 14 minutes. This is a three-minute increase from the previous season and a record high. At the same time, the average amount of TV viewing by an individual each day was four hours, 35 minutes, also a record level.

Nielsen Media Research also reports that although teens are often early adopters of new technology, such as competing video devices, TV viewing among teens aged 12 to 17 increased 3% a day from the previous year. Teen girls, whose per-day viewing rose 6%, led this increase.

"These results demonstrate that television still holds its position as the most popular entertainment platform," says Patricia McDonough, senior vice president of Planning Policy & Analysis at Nielsen Media Research.

Television Viewing Per 24-Hour Period

Television Season	Homes Average Hours, Minutes Per Day	Individuals* Average Hours, Minutes Per Day
2005/2006	8:14	4:35
2004/2005	8:11	4:32
2003/2004	8:01	4:25
2002/2003	7:55	4:25
2001/2002	7:42	4:18
2000/2001	7:39	4:15
1999/2000	7:31	4:06
1998/1999	7:24	4:00
1997/1998	7:15	3:58
1996/1997	7:12	3:56
1995/1996	7:15	3:59

*Persons aged 2 and older.

Source: Nielsen Media Research

tidbits

Spending on CE devices for **back-to-school** shopping increased 6.4% in dollars or revenue this year over last. Sales of notebooks (50% unit increase) and LCD **TVs under 26 inches** (57% unit increase) spurred the growth.

Source: The NPD Group



The number of **Wi-Fi-enabled** CE devices will increase from 40 million shipped this year to nearly 249 million in 2011.

Source: ABI Research

Homes with HDTV service will grow from 15 million in mid-2006 to 20.3 million by the end of 2006.

Source: In-Stat

45% of "heavy gamers," as defined by The NPD Group, are between the ages of 6 and 17, and 21% of this category of gamers is female.

Source: The NPD Group

There are almost 31 million PC-owning home-office households in the United States, a number expected to increase to beyond 36 million by 2010.

Source: IDC

outfit your life

open Accessories With Style

Ho ho ho.

COMPILED BY SEAN DOOLITTLE

Playaway Audio Books

Price varies by title •
www.playawaydigital.com

Now here's an idea: portable audiobooks that play themselves. For roughly the price of a standard CD audiobook title (*The Da Vinci Code*, for example, will set you back a comparable \$49.99), you get a preloaded, AAA battery-powered digital audio player with eight control buttons, a set of ear buds, a standard headphone output jack, and a carrying lanyard.



Muji Cardboard Box Speakers

\$42 (\$37.80 for MoMA members) •
www.momastore.com

Here's a pair of holiday boxes you can get some use out of the other days of year. Muji, which takes its name from a Japanese phrase meaning "No Brand Goods," has a design philosophy that emphasizes the combination of simple materials with low-cost processing and minimal packaging. We can't resist pointing out that gift wrapping is available via MoMa's online store. . . .

Jabra BT160 Bluetooth Headset

\$59.99 • www.jabra.com

This Bluetooth mobile headset comes with 33 interchangeable designer covers, from Autumn to Zebra. "Wild, sporty, elegant, fruity, scary, or just plain gorgeous," the company says, "the Jabra BT160 has a look to match." You can also customize the BT160 with your own graphics and text at Jabra.



Mixx Happy Flower Standard iPod Holder

\$25.99

www.alternativeoutfitters.com

If the plight of the Holiday Ham has you down this season, consider this "cruelty-free" iPod holder from Alternative Outfitters. Constructed entirely of neoprene, this vegan-friendly pouch conforms to the company's belief that "no animal should have to make any type of sacrifice for us to look and feel good."



Each month, Vince Cogley and Trista Kunce, both staff members at Sandhills Publishing, share their thoughts about a device or two of their choice. They may not reach common ground on living room décor, but they both agree that CE helps them live well, just sometimes in different ways.

His . . .

Although I enjoy my share of video games such as *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, I've never felt branded with a scarlet "A." Still, it always seems to spark my ire whenever I read another "video-games-are-corrupting-our-youth-and-destroying-civilization-as-we-know-it" article. After logging countless hours playing the aforementioned, purported hoodlum-training game, I can safely say I'm no closer to carjacking a Camry or engaging in other criminal behavior than before I started playing it.

Yet, it seems the cry for games that are appropriate for all ages grows louder every time I fire up my PlayStation 2. I must admit that as a new family man, I may have to listen to some of those cries. Now, I'm not saying I'll be trading in *Metal Gear Solid 3* to start a library of *Pokemon* titles, but I need to be conscious of my gaming habits, as well as purchase games suited for younger gamers.

The Nintendo DS Lite (\$129.99; www.nintendo.com) is currently the king of family friendly video game systems. A sleeker (but not less powerful) version of the globally successful Nintendo DS, this system puts a twist on traditional handheld gaming devices by having two screens, one of which is touch-sensitive.

From a parental perspective, the DS Lite is certainly cute and has plenty of fun games for kids. If your episodes of "House" have to compete with "The Suite Life of Zack and Cody" and "Danny Phantom" for space on your TiVo, you'll be pleased to know that your youngster will find a healthy supply of entertainment for the DS Lite. And Nintendo's cash cow *Super Mario Bros.* (along with countless spinoffs) is just as addictive for older gamers as it is for younger gamers.

I initially thought the DS Lite's stylus, which you use with its touchscreen, could be a source of frustration for young fingers still developing fine motor skills, but my friend's 3-year-old daughter doesn't have problems with *True Swing Golf*. And even if other games may require more intricate stylus strokes, there are plenty of games that require using only the DS Lite's directional pad and buttons.

Now if I doff my dad hat and replace it with my gamer cap, the DS Lite isn't quite as attractive. I thoroughly enjoyed grinding through *New Super Mario Bros.*, and *Brain Age* is proof that games can be educational and fun, but I need more. Daddy needs more grown-up games, and the touchscreen, though reasonably responsive, just doesn't have the wow factor necessary to justify a purchase. Give me a traditional controller and *Grand Theft Auto*.

But by all means, throw the DS Lite in the Highlander Hybrid for your next family vacation. Throw it in a stocking for Christmas. Just don't throw a fit if your boyfriend prefers his Xbox 360. **FG**



BY VINCE COGLEY

& Hers CE

As a former English major, I appreciate references to great literature in everyday life. I'm sometimes surprised by where I stumble upon these references, but I always love finding a passage or quote from a classic work of literature in an unlikely place.

This month, for instance, while playing an addictive game called Brain Age on Nintendo's DS Lite handheld gaming device Vince and I got to review, I read aloud several passages from "Wuthering Heights" and "Moby Dick." This was a part of the "Reading Outloud" brain training program, and—of course—my brain performed fantastically at "jet" speed.

My husband, Dan, however, doesn't like to read anything outloud, and Brain Age rated his "Reading Outloud" brain speed a bit slower than mine. Dan does, however, have great hand-eye coordination and is close to saving Princess Peach in the Super Mario Bros. game. (I, unfortunately, am still battling through level 1.)

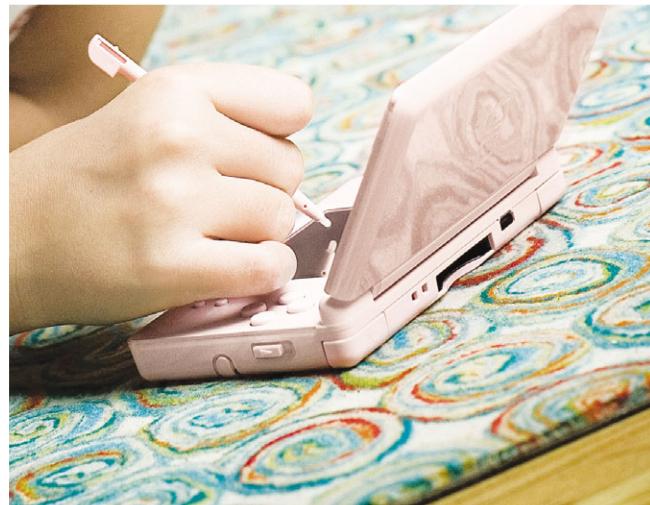
Besides the wide selection of games you can get for the DS Lite, the handheld itself is the most attractive, slim (0.85 x 5.2 x 73.9 inches [HxWxD]), and light (7.6 ounces) handheld gaming device I've played with in a long time. Back in 1989, my sister got a Nintendo Game Boy, and that was the first and last time I played a video game on a handheld.

The DS Lite, with its stylish looks and small size, is clearly an upgrade from my sister's Game Boy, but at first glance I thought it looked and felt a bit delicate compared to the chunky, sturdy Game Boy of my childhood, but the DS Lite proved me wrong. I needed some entertainment on a road trip, so I crammed the DS Lite into my purse, which I forgot to close. As I tossed my purse into the car, the DS Lite fell out crashing onto the driveway. But lucky for me the handheld survived the fall with nary a scratch.

Durable, fashionable, entertaining for all ages, it fits in my purse, and I can get it in pink (or black for Dan). What else could I want? Wireless capabilities, of course. The DS Lite not only has a wireless mode, but I can also use the Nintendo WFC (Wi-Fi Connection) feature. If Dan and I both get DS Lites, say, for Christmas, that means with the wireless mode we can sit by the Christmas tree and send each other little love notes via PictoChat or battle it out in Mario Kart DS over eggnog. Or I could use the Nintendo WFC and my wireless router to play Wi-Fi-compatible games, such as Tetris, via the Internet at home. (If you don't have a wireless router, you can buy a Wi-Fi USB Connector at Best Buy [\$41.99; www.bestbuy.com].)

With wireless capabilities rounding out the DS Lite package, I'm sold. I'll take two: One for Dan so he can brush up on the classics, and a second so I can work on helping Mario save the princess. (Plus, if Dan gets a DS Lite for Christmas, then I won't need to purchase an expensive game console.) **FG**

BY TRISTA KUNCE



Nintendo DS Lite
\$129.99
www.nintendo.com



Welcome to the center of your universe

The Synergy Series from Klipsch.

The highest-quality materials, ultra-reliable components and refined styling deliver high-performance home entertainment sure to rock your world. Whatever the source material, Synergy delivers everything from the softest whisper to the most intense, heart-stopping action with the clarity, definition and intensity that make Klipsch speakers the ultimate sound experience. Hear for yourself at Best Buy or visit klipsch.com for more information.

THE ULTIMATE SOUND EXPERIENCE™



Synergy Series

Without a doubt, Klipsch Synergy Series speakers create unique, ultrodynamic musical and cinematic experiences that capture all of the emotion of your favorite artists and filmmakers.

Klipsch's ongoing experience in the cinema industry is a significant benefit to its customers because the cutting-edge research that drives its professional theater speakers is also applied to its home theater products.

All Synergy speakers feature genuine, professional-style horn technology, which delivers smooth, natural performance with

unmatched clarity and detail. Plus, these speakers are highly efficient, meaning they can fill any size room with powerful, concert hall quality sound but without the distortion of conventional speakers.

Available in an assortment of sleek floorstanding, bookshelf, flat-panel and micro systems, the Synergy Series offers superior performance and seamless integration in a variety of styles and price points. Regardless of what system you choose, the same high-end materials and tried-and-true technology are used in every single Synergy product.

Each Synergy speaker also undergoes rigorous quality tests before it ever leaves the factory. This attention to detail guarantees the years of reliable performance that's expected from Klipsch.

More than just a name, the Synergy Series represents high-value, high-performance sound solutions. And it only makes sense; Klipsch has been in the business of producing no-compromise, premium-quality speakers for over 60 years.

Every Great Artist has a Signature Sound

For Klipsch, it's the horn. Realizing that the qualities that make the horn nature's ideal sound-gathering shape also make it perfect for accurate and dynamic sound transmission, Paul W. Klipsch created the first Klipschorn® in 1946. Since then, Klipsch's proprietary horn technology has been the driving force behind the company's highly acclaimed and stunningly precise sound. To this day, every speaker Klipsch makes—from the smallest satellites to Professional Cinema speakers—is horn loaded to create remarkably accurate, efficient and compromise-free acoustics. Long live great sound.



Fab Four

Tis the season for joyful giving and receiving; a time for gathering with friends and family to capture memories and enjoy the company of the people you love. Our Fab Four this month are all gifts that keep on giving. A

camera that the whole family can use; an MP3 player that does it all; a super-cool mobile phone; and a high-quality home-theater projector that's perfect for showing "It's a Wonderful Life," "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," and all the other holiday favorites.

digital camera



\$299.95 • www.nikonusa.com

digital camera

Why: A new addition to the Nikon Life series, the Coolpix L5 was designed to appeal to families. Its price point (sub-\$300), its size, and its feature set were all created with a typical family of users in mind. It's a great camera to take to your daughter's basketball game, your sister's graduation, your son's recital, or on your family vacation. This 7.2MP point-and-shoot camera sports a 2.5-inch LCD, 5X zoom, and Vibration Reduction, an in-camera stabilization technology to cut back on blur caused by shaky hands. It performs well indoors in low light or in wide outdoor scenes and includes 15 preset Scene modes to help compose perfect pictures anywhere. Other in-camera features include: Face-priority AF, which finds and focuses on a subject's face; In-Camera Red-Eye Fix, which corrects red-eye; and D-Lighting, which corrects images with insufficient light. The L5 also includes 8MB of internal memory and TV-quality movie recording with sound.

Bottom line: Steady-as-she-goes

mp3 player



\$399.99 (30GB) • www.gigabeat.com

mp3 player

Why: Toshiba's new gigabeat V Series improves upon its popular predecessor, the gigabeat S Series, with its larger screen (3.5 inch) and longer battery life (8 hours video; 25 hours audio play). It supports Windows Media Video 9 and 10, as well as Microsoft's Portable Media Center Version 2.0 software, so Windows users can transfer video or audio directly from their PCs using WMP10. The gigabeat V is compatible with all PlaysForSure subscription-based video and audio download services such as Napster, eMusic, and RealNetworks Rhapsody. It supports MP3, WMA, WMA Lossless, and WAV audio files, as well as Windows DRM 9 and 10. The V Series provides JPEG playback and lets you transfer photos from your digicam to your gigabeat without using a computer. One of its coolest features is a built-in speaker, so you can watch and listen without headphones. The gigabeat V Series also comes with an A/V output cable, so you can watch video, listen to audio, or display photos on your TV.

Bottom line: All-in-one media player

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

phone



Cingular 3135

\$299.99 • www.cingular.com

phone

wild card



Epson PowerLite Home Cinema 400

\$1,599.99
• www.epson.com

wild card

The Camera:
Nikon Coolpix L5**\$299.95**www.nikonusa.com

The MP3 Player:

Toshiba gigabeat V**\$399.99** (30GB)www.gigabeat.comThe Phone:
Cingular 3135**\$299.99**www.cingular.comThe Wild Card:
Epson PowerLite Home Cinema 400**\$1,599.99**www.epson.com

Why: The new Cingular 3125 is the first Windows Mobile 5.0 smartphone to come in a clamshell (rather than candy bar) design. Its measurements rival the slimmest of flip phones, yet it manages to provide a vibrant 2.2-inch color screen, full email and PIM capabilities, and a 1.3MP camera. You can even view PDF and Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint files. Weighing just under 4 ounces, this GSM/EDGE phone is comfortable to slip into purses and pockets. Its design is minimalist but somewhat masculine. Multimedia features include support for WMP 10 and a stereo headphone jack for listening to various audio file-types. The 3125 has the basics we've come to expect from our mobile devices: text messaging, MMS, Bluetooth, and ringtones. The camera takes still pictures and video. One fun perk: For each entry in the address book, you can store three email and instant-message addresses, birthdays, and a picture for caller ID.

Bottom Line: Slim, slick clamshell smartphone

Why: New from Epson America, the PowerLite Home Cinema 400 HD front projector is made to satisfy DIY home-theater buffs and high-end video gamers. Relatively simple to set up and use, it offers good HD resolution (720p in widescreen 16:9 format) at a reasonable price. Released this fall, the Home Cinema 400 achieves a contrast ratio up to 5000:1 and produces respectable brightness levels. Epson 3LCD microdisplay projection technology helps to create excellent color quality and video performance by using three LCD chips to project images free of artifacts. Because the Epson 3LCD works without a moving color wheel and offers accurate color registration, images are crisp and rainbow-free. The Home Cinema 400 serves up seven color modes to allow for various lighting conditions; vertical and horizontal optical lens shift; and filters that enhance digital images to make watching movies at home seem more like watching movies in a theater. The device weighs 11.5 pounds, and the remote has a range of 30 feet.

Bottom Line: Big-screen theater at home



Thin Is In

Altec Lansing's inMotion iM500 Speakers For Your nano

When the iPod nano debuted in 2005, we were somewhat amused by the way Apple CEO Steve Jobs chose to describe it: "impossibly small." Just marketing hype, we reasoned.

And then we held a nano and had to agree. We couldn't believe how small the nano was. How could something so tiny, so lightweight, hold so many songs and sound so good?

Similarly, Altec Lansing, the company that makes the inMotion iM500 (\$129.95;

www.alteclansing.com) portable audio system for the iPod nano, is calling this speaker system impossibly thin. And we have to agree.

The iM500 is a remarkable combination of sleekness, sound, and portability, which makes it an ideal carry-along for nano users.

Small & Sleek

When you first look at the iM500, you wonder why Altec Lansing would bother including an instructional book. The iM500 is so small and sleek—it's

less than an inch thick—that you figure it can't have too many features you need to brush up on.

But there's more than initially meets the eye to the iM500, so we'll walk you through everything we found as we tested these speakers.

At first glance, it's perfectly clear where to place the nano in this system. On the front of the speakers is a slightly indented space in the shape of the nano with a docking station at the base. (The docking station also works as a recharger for the nano.) In the middle of

Considering the small size of the speakers, the sound quality is impressive.

that space is a rectangular button. Press this to extend the feet, or base, of the speakers on each side. We found the base to be very stable, no matter what surface we placed the iM500 on.

The front half of the base also contains a few settings buttons. To the left is the power button, a blue LED that lights up when the iM500 is powered on. Whether you choose to run the iM500 on battery power or by plugging it in with the included AC adapter, you must press the power button to turn on the speakers. (See the "Power Options" sidebar for more information.)

To the right of the docking station are two volume buttons, indicated by "+" and "-" symbols.

Because the iM500 is made specifically for the iPod nano, and because it does not contain a radio or alarm, the speakers aren't loaded with lots of switches and buttons you might find on other iPod-compatible gadgets. For example, the dock on the front is small because it works only with the nano. You won't find dock adapters in the packaging with the iM500, as you might with other products, because only the nano will fit in the front of the speakers.

However, this doesn't mean you can't use the speakers with other products. On the back of the speakers you'll find ways to do just that. In addition to two battery compartments and an AC connector, the backside of the speakers holds an auxiliary input jack and USB port.

With the auxiliary input jack, you can connect the speaker system to a non-dockable iPod or other MP3 player, CD player, portable DVD player, or other audio source. Using the USB port, you can hook up the iM500 to a notebook. These simple hookups greatly expand the ways you can use this speaker

system (see our "The Ideal Accessory" sidebar for more information).

Impressive Sound

Once you've set up the iM500, you're ready to enjoy its best feature—the sound system, of course. Turn on the speakers, and then turn on the nano before inserting it in the docking station. To select a song, use the Click Wheel on the nano as you normally would (the iM500 does not include a remote).

Considering the small size of the speakers, the sound quality is impressive. The iM500 employs broad-faced speaker cones, the part of the speakers that vibrates. Broad-faced speakers provide a relatively large surface area, which pushes more air into this space. Because sound relies on air movement, the more air that moves in this space, the better.

In addition, the iM500 uses MaxxBass technology to give the audio a deeper, richer quality, considering the petite size of the speakers. This means you can enjoy the bass lines in your music without disturbing your next-door or downstairs neighbors. And we discovered that the music sounds the same no matter what surface we placed the iM500 on. Carpet doesn't muffle the music; a slick counter or tabletop doesn't "rattle" the sound with annoying vibration.

Pack & Go

When marketers label a product "portable," that pronouncement is subject to interpretation. The iM500 is portable in the best sense of the word—you *want* to pack it up and take it with you. To transport the speakers, remove the nano and fold up the feet. Then slip the speakers into the included carrying case, which is more like a protective pouch. The pouch isn't big enough to hold the AC cord, but that's OK. You wouldn't want to scratch the black sheen of the speakers by having

anything brush up against the system while you're transporting it.

The speakers, which weigh a mere 12 ounces, fold down into a 5- x 8.5- x 0.7-inch frame (HxWxD). That's small enough to fit into a notebook bag or purse, and it leaves plenty of room for your nano, the AC adapter, and auxiliary cord, if you want to bring either accessory along.

Plays Nice, Looks Nice

We love products that play nicely with iPods, especially the nano. Any device that lets us pop out our earbuds and crank up our iTunes grabs our attention.

True to its word, the iM500 is as impossibly thin as the nano itself.

But beyond its great sound and size, the iM500 looks nice. It comes in only one color, a glossy black finish, but imagine how sharp your nano—no matter which shade of nano you own—will look resting in that dock, nestled between the speakers.

If you're looking for a way to maximize the sound from the most minimal of audio devices, the iM500 is a good choice. Thin may be in, but with these speakers you'll want to be out and about. 

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

The Ideal Accessory

Accessorizing your iPod nano with the ultra-portable, ultra-sleek iM500 speaker system is ultimately a matter of preference. If you're a gadget girl who loves to take her music with her, or whose residence (such as a dorm room or apartment) is tight on space, or who just loves the look of sleek gadgets in an open space (the iM500 would sit pretty on a granite kitchen countertop), then you'll get lots of use out of these speakers.

The iM500 doesn't accessorize the nano alone. The system comes with a short auxiliary cord that lets you hook up other audio devices to the speakers. So if you have a portable DVD player, for instance, take along the iM500 with the player, and you'll enhance the sound of the movie you're watching. You can attach the speakers to your notebook, too. Just use a USB cable (not included), and you can not only add audio depth to your computing experience, but transfer songs and photos from your laptop to the nano while it's docked in the speakers. 

Power Options

It's logical that a portable speaker system should give you the option of running it on batteries. When not plugged in, the iM500 can work on six AAA batteries (not included) for about seven hours. Each battery compartment on the back holds three batteries. If you think you'll be using the speakers away from a power source often, you'll want to invest in some rechargeable batteries, too.

One of the iM500's best features is its automatic shut-off. If the speakers don't detect any audio for three minutes, they will shut down, regardless of which power source you are using. This is especially helpful when running the speakers on batteries. 

A/V Club Shopping Tips

Earphones

BY BLAINE A. FLAMIG

If you're thinking of earphones as a stocking stuffer for that music lover in your life, good for you. Earphones are an often-overlooked, yet integral, audio accessory. Further, like speaker systems, sound cards, and other audio-related hardware, they're a great buy; you get a lot of quality for what you pay. Better, weeding out the pretenders to find the pair you want isn't that difficult. Here are tips you can tear out and take with you while you shop. The best advice regarding earphones, though, is to try them first, if at all possible.

The earphones, or headphones, market is full of either/ors. Either you want a wired or wireless pair. Either you want an over-the-ear or in-the-ear model. Either you want a headband or you don't. These qualifiers alone narrow the choices considerably. In terms of style, there's a good range of looks across all price points, from sleek wraparounds (great for sports) to standalone pads with ear clips. As for cost, earphones run from \$10 to hundreds, but obviously, the more you pay, the better the audio quality and accessories (carrying case, replaceable earbud covers, etc.) should be.

Your wireless choices are based predominantly on Bluetooth, infrared, or RF (radio frequency) technologies. Bluetooth is limited to about 30 feet of coverage, but many road warriors and avid exercisers use this option with cell phones and portable music players. Infrared and RF models cover greater distances, but infrared models need a constant line of sight with a transmitter, and RF models are known to interfere with some cordless phones and appliances. Wireless options aren't known for providing stellar quality, but they're getting better all the time. A notable option is Logitech's new FreePulse Wireless (\$99; www.logitech.com).

Wired choices include over-the-ear (closed-back) models, which encircle the ear; pad-styled (opened-back) models, which don't enclose the ear; earbuds, which sit in the ear; and in-the-ear models, which fit in the ear canal. Many wired models include noise isolating features that block ambient noise (think trains, subways, airplanes, etc.). Pad-styled models have slightly better audio quality than closed-back earphones at the low end, but they allow ambient noise, which joggers prefer so they can hear traffic. Well-regarded wired models include Shure's E series (about \$100 to \$500; www.shure.com).

For more specific uses, some earphones target gamers, audiophiles (solid bass performance), DVD movie buffs (surround-sound support), and techies (crisp, clean audio). Options include Razer's Barracuda HP-1 Gaming Headphones (\$129.99; www.razerzone.com) for PC gamers, Sennheiser's HD650 (\$549; www.sennheiserusa.com) for audiophiles and DVD buffs, and Plantronics cordless and wired VoIP (Voice over IP) headsets (\$107 to \$399.95; www.plantronics.com) for placing phone calls over the Internet.

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

Do You Want Headphones With Or Without Wires?

- Wired—better performance
- Wireless—more flexibility

Which Wireless Option Do You Want?

- Bluetooth
- Infrared
- RF (Radio Frequency)

What Form Factor Do You Want?

- Over the ear
- In the ear

What Type Of User Are You? (Best Option)

- Audiophile
- PC Gamer
- Road warrior
- DVD movie buff
- Exerciser

What Is Your Budget?

- \$10 to \$50 (fair to good quality)
- \$50 to \$200 (good to great quality)
- \$200 on up (stellar quality)

Notes



And Now For Our Feature Presentation

The Low-Down On High-Definition

The world of HDTV is awhirl with exciting options. As with any wildly popular technology, some options are crucial and can be completely irrelevant. Below, we separate fact from fiction and give you the low-down on the features you should consider if you're in the market for an HDTV.

HD Tuner

Think of an HD display (your TV set) and an HD signal (the programming that comes from broadcasters) as separate pieces of a puzzle. You can have one without the other, but you need both if you want to watch HDTV. An HD tuner (also called an ATSC tuner) connects the two, enabling HDTVs to receive and process high-definition signals.

Your cable or satellite company will provide you with a set-top receiver, which

includes a built-in HD tuner, when you subscribe to HDTV. (You will likely have to purchase or rent the unit.) However, if you don't want to subscribe to cable or satellite, you can still receive local over-the-air HD broadcasts with a built-in HD tuner and an antenna.

CableCard

Televisions with CableCard capabilities sometimes come labeled as DCR (digital cable-ready). A CableCard lets you replace the cable box with a simple card,

shelf Watch

DLO HomeDock Deluxe
\$149.99 • www.dlo.com

You've got the iPod, and you just bought a new HDTV. Why not use them both together with DLO's HomeDock Deluxe? Connect the dock to your TV, and you can navigate your iPod's music on your TV with the included 18-button remote control. The coolest feature, though, is that you can watch DVD-quality movies you've downloaded through iTunes on your TV, too.



provided by your cable company, that slides right into your HDTV. CableCards are slightly thicker than credit cards, and about the same width and length. Their slots usually fit into the side or back of compatible television sets.

CableCards have a few limitations, however. Obviously, you can only use them if you subscribe to cable; satellite subscribers are out of luck. A CableCard also doesn't support two-way communications, so you won't be able to use

video on demand, pay-per-view, or anything else you select from your remote. CableCards also don't work with all cable companies' channel guides. See if your cable provider offers a CableCard option and ask about its limitations before making this feature a priority in your purchase.

Image Resolution

HDTVs break each picture into either 720 or 1,080 horizontal lines. If your TV is 1080i, that means it is interlaced scan and refreshes every other line 60 times a second. If your TV is 720p or 1080p, that means it is progressive scan and refreshes every line 60 times a second. The more lines a set displays, the sharper its picture. Progressive scan removes flicker and creates smoother lines.

Remember this rule: Higher resolution is better, and progressive beats interlaced. Thus, 1080p is the highest resolution available. Resolution matters more for large screens than smaller ones, though, as bigger pictures magnify quality differences. For small sets, the difference between 720p and 1080p won't matter much. The improved quality from higher resolutions becomes noticeable on screens over 42 inches. However, the debate rages over whether the higher resolution (1080i) or the better scan (720p) matters more for large screens—truth is they're about even to almost everyone. Regardless, 1080p eventually will make the debate moot, and there aren't perceivable differences for smaller screens.

should make sure the TV you're planning on buying does. Other connections (including component and DVI) can carry high-definition programming, but only HDMI combines video and audio in a single cable while maintaining a digital format throughout the entire process (rather than converting between digital and analog). Component and DVI carry HD signals, but component connections convert to analog, and neither component nor DVI carry audio.

Even if your current DVD player or set-top box doesn't have HDMI inputs, your next one probably will. DVD players and high-definition DVRs that upconvert signals to higher resolutions often make those high-quality outputs available only through their HDMI ports. Without HDMI, you won't get your source's highest-quality signal.

Virtual Surround

Many HDTVs advertise "virtual surround" capabilities. Such technologies allow you to listen to multichannel soundtracks without having to use 5.1- or 7.1-channel surround speakers.

Virtual surround is useful if you aren't interested in a home-theater system with its accompanying A/V receiver, speakers, and cables. But be aware that virtual surround quality varies. Sometimes turning virtual surround off

Accessories

Rows of TV accessories beckon from your favorite retailer's shelves. Which warrant your money?

Cables. Most manufacturers include only cables for low-quality connections, such as composite video. If you're using HDMI or component connections (and you should be), you'll probably have to buy the cables.

Programmable universal remote. Reduce remotes with a programmable model that controls all your devices. Logitech's Harmony series identifies all your equipment and creates automatic activity sequences with an ingenious online wizard.

Surge protector. Are you prepared to leave an expensive new HDTV at the mercy of the power grid?

Aerial antenna. If over-the-air HDTV is available where you live (check www.antennaweb.org), spend a little on an indoor antenna to receive free local HD programming.



HDMI

If your cable or satellite receiver, DVD player, or game console includes HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface) outputs, you need HDMI inputs. Not all HDTVs have HDMI inputs, but you

actually improves audio quality. Check out each model's virtual surround mode in the store before deciding whether it adds any value to your purchase.

Wall Mounts

One of the coolest things about having a flat-panel TV is mounting it on your wall. If you want to hang yours, make sure you have the right kind of location on your wall: It should have accessible wall studs behind it, and you should make sure your TV won't suffer from glare from windows or lamps. Most HDTV vendors offer mounting kits designed for specific models. Other manufacturers offer universal mounting brackets; if you buy one of these, double-check that your model will work with it. Installing wall mounts isn't particularly complicated or time-consuming, but it absolutely must be

done properly. Look into paying for professional installation for peace of mind.

Media Card Reader

Some HDTVs have built-in media card readers for memory cards loaded with pictures, videos, and music. Popping your memory card right into the TV for viewing instant slideshows and home videos is handy, but make sure you shoot at a high enough resolution on your camera to make the pictures look good on a big-screen HDTV.

PIP (Picture In Picture)

PIP shows two channels at once, placing the second image in a small window overlaying the main screen. Some PIP variations adjust window size and placement, even putting them side by side and splitting the screen in half.

PIP is cool, especially for football games and other sporting events, but it does have its limitations. Most importantly, PIP requires at least two separate video sources. You can't watch two channels coming from the same connection unless you have independent outputs (two lines coming from a cable box, for example). Otherwise, you'll need completely separate sources (such as a cable line and antenna feed or live TV and a TiVo) to take advantage of dual-screen modes.

Big electronics retailers like Best Buy guarantee they can find the right HDTV for you. We can help make sure you're well-prepared before going to the store. **TC**

BY GREGORY ANDERSON

The Low-Down

Here are the absolute basics you need to know about each feature we discuss above.

HD tuner. A built-in HD tuner only matters if you're getting OTA (over-the-air) signals via antenna; otherwise, you'll get one with your digital cable or HD satellite box.

CableCard. Look for a CableCard slot in your HDTV if you're a cable subscriber, your provider offers them, and you're not planning on using video on demand.

Image resolution. Go for the highest resolution your budget allows. The importance of resolution increases with larger screen sizes.

HDMI. HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface) is the connector that ensures the highest-quality signals. Make HDMI connectivity a priority in your purchase.

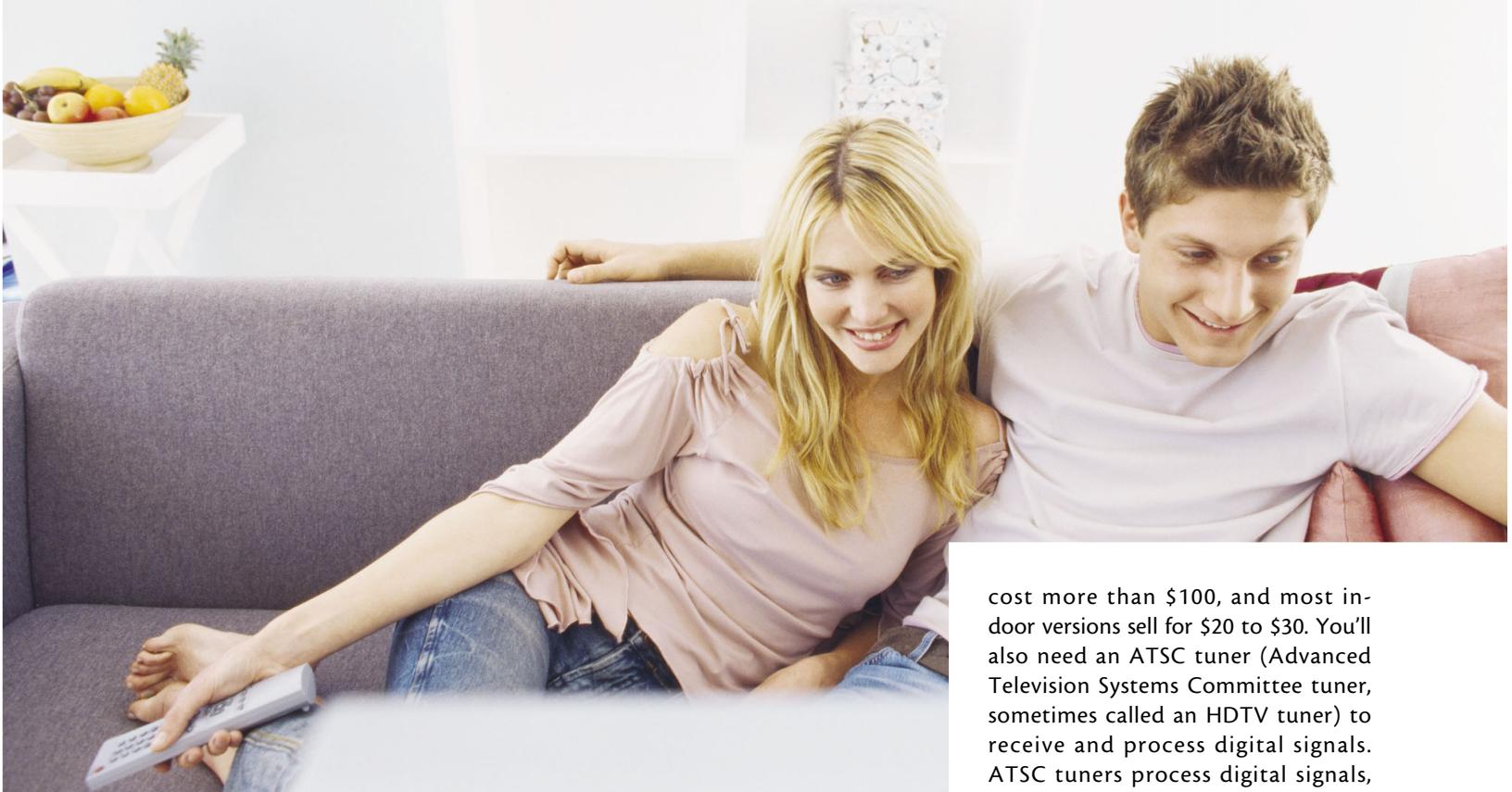
Virtual surround. Virtual surround is an OK substitution for a complete home-theater system, but don't expect the same quality as a 5.1- or 7.1-channel system.

Wall mount installation. Definitely consider professional installation services offered by most HDTV retailers, especially if you buy a larger set.

Media card reader. If you shoot a lot of digital photos or video and have a high-resolution camera, media card readers are great.

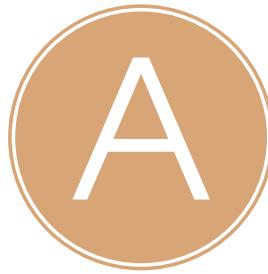
PIP. PIP (picture in picture) is a useful feature, but only if you have multiple programming sources.





Lessons In HDTV

Out Of Thin Air



A new high-definition TV is only as good as the source material you feed into it. The sharpest and brightest set won't do Nova or Notre Dame justice unless you have reliable access to high-quality broadcasts. You can get HDTV from the same three sources that have been available for years: cable, satellite, and an antenna for OTA (over-the-air) broadcasts. You probably know something about cable and satellite, but you might be surprised at how far the "old-fashioned" antenna approach has come—as a sole source of programming or as a way to supplement subscription services.

Grabbing OTA TV signals from the sky with an antenna is as old as television itself, and you won't pay a shiny dime for

them. The greatest advantage of OTA HDTV, however, is that you no longer have to sacrifice image quality for free local programming. The high-definition pictures broadcast by your local PBS affiliate are just as sharp as any cable or satellite HD channel. Of course, you'll receive a perfect picture or nothing at all, as HD signals are digital (though not all digital broadcasts are high-definition). You have to be within range to receive the signal, and different broadcasters have different signal strengths in different areas. Online tools such as the CEA's (Consumer Electronic Association's) AntennaWeb.org (www.antennaweb.org) can help you locate the digital and HD channels that are available in your area.

OTA's equipment demands are modest, as well. You'll need an antenna. Terk and RCA make respected models, or you can press an old antenna back into service. New rooftop models rarely

cost more than \$100, and most indoor versions sell for \$20 to \$30. You'll also need an ATSC tuner (Advanced Television Systems Committee tuner, sometimes called an HDTV tuner) to receive and process digital signals. ATSC tuners process digital signals, both HD and non-HD. As of March 1, all televisions manufactured with 25-inch or larger screens must include built-in HD tuners and, as of March 1, 2007, all televisions must have them—or they'll be considered monitors, not TVs. Many cable and satellite set-top boxes, and some DVRs, include ATSC tuners for those who want to combine the best of all worlds.

As it always has, OTA offers a more limited channel selection than other sources. In most areas you'll have access to the local network affiliates, public television stations, and an occasional independent broadcaster. That lineup, however, is enough to offer almost all the most popular shows, sports, and educational programming. If you're a satellite subscriber missing local independent or community channels, or a cable customer without reasonable HDTV options, adding an antenna is a great way to expand your viewing choices. Your digital television, tuner, and antenna are all backward compatible, as well, so you'll still be able to pick up analog broadcasts (though not at HD resolutions, meaning your ATSC tuner won't automatically upconvert signals, such as 480i to 720p). **FG**

BY GREGORY ANDERSON

tips

TV Placement In Small Spaces

1

Hang Your TV On The Wall

Although a small, intimate room probably won't accommodate a 50-inch HDTV, you don't have to give up on your dream of having a widescreen TV in your 12x12 bedroom or family room. Consider a flat-panel LCD TV, which you can mount on a wall. Wall mounting saves at least 12 inches of space that you'd usually lose when you have a bulkier CRT TV, not to mention the space the TV stand itself usually takes up. And because you can sit closer to HDTVs than you could to analog sets (the closer you sit to an analog TV, the more horizontal scan lines your eyes detect), you can actually put a good-sized screen in a small space.

2

Room Calculations

When you calculate the viewing distances in your small room, don't forget to subtract the distance your TV sits out from the wall from the length or width of your room. Measure from the center of the couch or chair you usually sit in to the front of your television, instead of wall to wall. You'll likely lose 12 to 18 inches behind the entertainment center or TV stand and another six to 12 inches behind your easy chair, too, which is another reason flat-panel LCD or plasma TVs are good choices for small rooms.

3

Combine Components

Look for an HD television that has an integrated DVD player and front- or side-panel speakers to help save space. We're impressed with the Toshiba 20HLV86 (\$799.99; www.toshiba.com) 20-inch diagonal LCD HD monitor TV, with its built-in TV tuner and DVD player. It also has HDMI inputs, plays back WMA and MP3 audio, and is available at Best Buy so you can take a look at it before you buy it. If you have a little more space, take a look at the Westinghouse 32-inch LCD HDTV/DVD Combo (\$999.99; www.westinghousedigital.com), which is only 31.5 inches wide by 7.5 inches deep and has an integrated high-def TV tuner and a front-load DVD player.

4

Room Décor

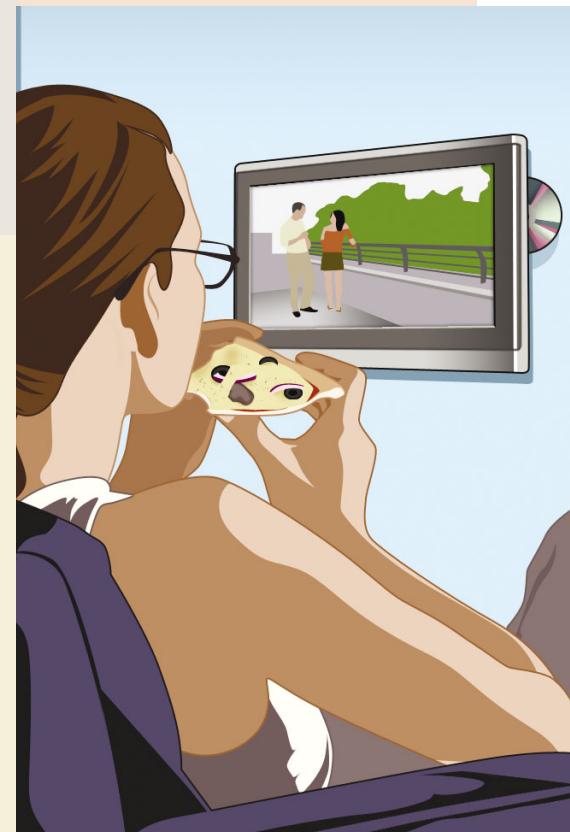
Optimal viewing conditions, such as light and distance, are important, of course, but good sound is equally as important to an immersive viewing experience. As you shop for your TV, know that the crisp, clear sounds you hear from the TV on the showroom floor may be muffled in your bedroom with its carpeted floor and curtained windows, not to mention the quilt and pillows on the queen-sized bed. Similarly, if you have hardwood floors, no window coverings, and lots of metal and glass surfaces in your room, the sound will bounce around a bit more because there's nothing to absorb it.

5

Viewing Distances

Although you can sit closer to your HDTV than you could your CRT TV, there are recommended minimum distances so you see the best picture possible. Your cozy living room may not be able to handle a 50-inch HDTV, so consider these minimum (and maximum) viewing distances before you shop for a new TV. This chart includes some common HDTV sizes and their corresponding minimum and maximum distances. You can use the chart as a guide for how far you should sit from your TV for optimal viewing, but you may find that your preferences don't completely coincide with these estimates.

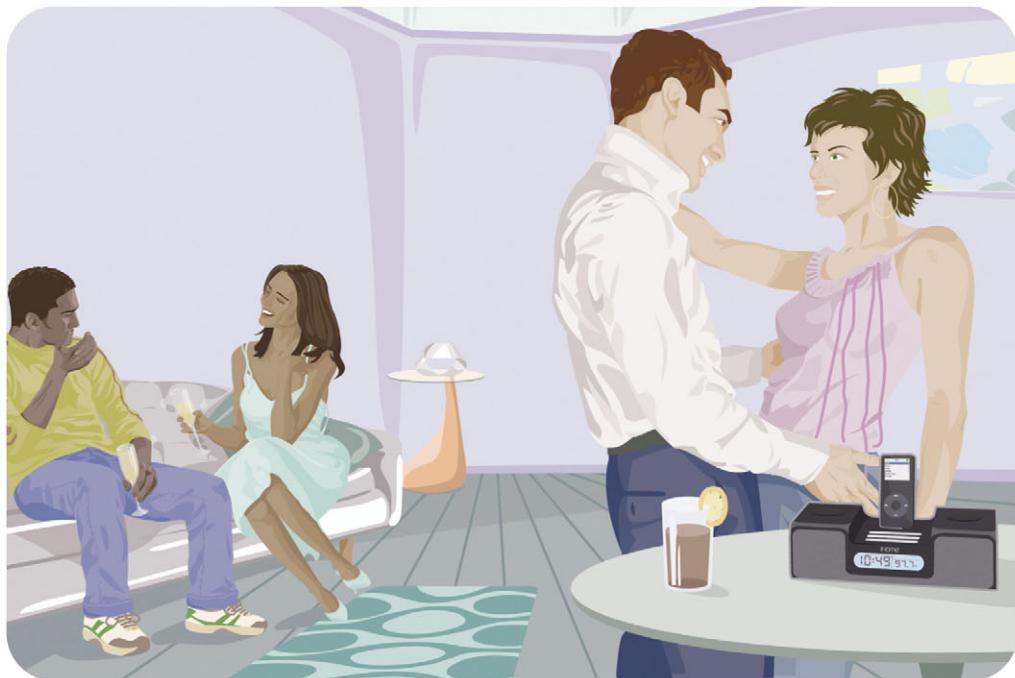
HDTV Screen Size	Minimum Viewing Distance	Maximum Viewing Distance
42-inch	5.25 feet	10.5 feet
37-inch	4.62 feet	9.25 feet
32-inch	4 feet	8 feet
27-inch	3.5 feet	6.75 feet
20-inch	2.5 feet	5 feet



BY KATHRYN DOLAN & JOSHUA GULICK



iH5



live



loud

 small in size and big in sound, all iHome systems reinvent your iPod experience. compact yet sleek, powerful yet astonishingly clear, each iHome system features the crystalline sound of Reson8™ Speakers, a charging dock fit for all docking iPods (including nano), and an individualized design to suit your life-sound-style, at home or on the go.

iH5. clock radio companion with Wake to iPod/Sleep to iPod functionality. moonlights as clever home stereo. **iH26.** trusty travel alarm clock to keep you on-time and in-tune on trips or at the office. traveling gear included. sound good? visit ihomeaudio.com for more info.



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Holiday Gift Guide

Buying Ideas For HDTVs, Digicams, MP3 Players
& Much More

Digital Foci 80GB Picture Porter Elite • \$469 • www.digitalfoci.com





S

hsssh. Hear that? Ah, yes! They're the unmistakable sounds of the holiday season. Shopping carts rattling. Shoppers battling.

Toys beeping. Toddlers shrieking. Cell phones ringing. Cash registers kachinging. The PlayStation 3 is on the scene. That HDTV has a brilliant screen. Dicams a snappin'. iPods a rappin'. And if you please, we'll take a new DVD with our Nintendo Wii.

Of course, the true meaning of Christmas and the holidays isn't about gifts, gadgets, or going gaga making a list and checking it twice, but there's no denying the right consumer electronic present can make a great holiday even better. Whether you're buying for a parent, teenage son, friend, or the nice woman who delivers your mail, there's a CE-related product that will make a great gift, no matter if it's \$10 or \$1,000.

As you head out to the stores or online to shop, keep the gift guides we've compiled on the following pages handy. They're full of HDTV, MP3 player, and digital camera gift ideas, plus cool stocking stuffers and other CE-related goodies for all ages. You'll also find our own Top 5 favorite devices (hint, hint) and tips for buying the perfect gift, which for us would be something like Digital Foci's 80GB Picture Porter Elite (www.digitalfoci.com). At \$469, it's pricey, but if you and your siblings are searching for a versatile gift for a tech-savvy parent, the Picture Porter Elite stores tons of photos, movies, music, and more for on-the-go use in a pocket-sized device.

Our own wishes aside, we also hit up some industry experts for their suggestions for CE gifts this year. Brian Lam, lead editor of popular CE blog Gizmodo

(www.gizmodo.com), says his wish list includes Nintendo's Wii console (\$250), a newer Canon D-SLR (digital single-lens reflex) digicam, such as the Rebel XTi (\$899), and Microsoft's Zune media player (rumored for a holiday release in the \$285 price range).

Julie Strietelmeier, editor of The Gadgeteer (www.the-gadgeteer.com) blog, suggests such lesser-known but innovative possibilities as MotionLingo's GPS-enabled ADEO Fitness Trainer (\$149; www.motionlingo.com); the vacuum tube-based iTube & iConec iPod Speaker System package (\$379; www.gini.com) from GINI Systems; American Innovative's Chef's Quad-Timer with four independent timers for serious cooks (\$19.99; www.americaninnovative.com); and the pzizz Personal Life Coach System (\$147; www.pzizz.com), a device that aims to help you take a power nap any time, any place. (Is it too late to revise our list?)

CE-related accessories always make great gifts. To that end, Jennifer Boone of the Consumer Electronics Association (www.ce.org) steered us toward such add-ons as decorative carrying cases and car kits for MP3 players; wireless and specialized controllers (steering wheels, bats, electronic fishing rods) for gaming consoles; programmable universal remotes, wall mounts, surge protectors, and wireless headphones for home-theater systems; and memory cards, rechargeable batteries, tripods, and carrying cases for digital cameras.

With these ideas in mind, read on to see our specific suggestions for HDTVs, digicams, and MP3 players, plus accessories and best bets for each category. Chances are you'll find the perfect something for that special someone. **FG**

BY BLAINE A. FLAMIG

HDTVs For The Holidays

Giving The Gift Of High Definition

Samsung's 30-inch SlimFit TX-S3082WH
\$899 • www.samsung.com



T

his holiday season, it's time to retire old Aunt Maude's fruitcake and give the gift that *really* keeps on giving: an HDTV. HDTVs are cheaper than ever, make everything you watch look better, and offer features that make your current standard-definition TV look about as appealing as a slice of fossilized dessert bread. But finding the TV that best suits you—or whoever heads up your "nice" list—can be complicated. Below, we'll describe the current HDTV types available, explain why they're so hot this season, and even recommend a few models that stand out from the rest.

Direct View

Direct-view TVs, also known as CRT (cathode-ray tube) or "tube" televisions for short, have been the most common TV type in most U.S. homes for decades. Direct-view TVs are available in analog and digital varieties and are popular because they offer excellent picture quality, unmatched **black levels** (intensity of black in the video image), and the ability to display an image that looks great from almost any angle, all at a very low price. You'll find direct-view sets in widescreen and full-screen aspect ratios up to 40 inches. The big drawback for direct-view TVs is bulk: They're almost as deep as they are wide, and larger models can weigh in excess of 200 pounds.

Some direct view terminology you may run across includes flat-screen and thin tubes. Flat-screen TVs, not to be confused with flat-panel TVs, refer to televisions that have flat, rather than convex, screens to cut down on glare. Thin tubes are direct-view TVs that feature CRT tubes that are much shallower than those of traditional CRT displays, making them more compact.

Samsung's 30-inch SlimFit TX-S3082WH (\$899; www.samsung.com) features a thin tube, which makes this direct-view TV two-thirds as deep as a traditional direct-view TV. If you need to save some cash for everyone else on your list, this affordable TV will help you ring in a high-def New Year.

Rear Projection

Rear-projection TVs look like traditional TVs because the image generating and projection hardware is enclosed within the TV's cabinet. These televisions use lenses, mirrors, or a projection lamp to project the video image against the back side of a translucent

screen. The RPTVs you'll see for sale this holiday use one of four microdisplay image-processing technologies: LCoS (Liquid Crystal on Silicon); DLP (Digital Light Processing); LCD (liquid-crystal display); or CRT.

LCoS RPTVs feature reflective silicon panels covered with liquid crystals that alternately reflect and absorb light to generate the projected HD image. DLP RPTVs employ a series of hundreds of thousands of microscopic tilting mirrors to generate an image that appears on the RPTV's screen. LCD RPTVs use tiny liquid-crystal emitters and mirrors to generate the projected images. Alternately, CRT RPTVs use cathode-ray tube emitters and mirrors to generate the images you see projected onto the RPTV's screen.

RPTVs, once commonly called "big screens," range in size from 40 to 65 or more inches and are the most affordable



Pioneer PDP-5070HD • \$4,499 •

www.pioneerelectronics.com

option when you're looking for a big TV to bring those holiday parades to life. RCA's R52WH76 (\$1,199; tv.rca.com) is not for those who take their



Accessories

When you're shopping for that special someone, don't forget to pick up these essential accessories.

DVD player. You may already have a DVD player, but now is a great time to spring for one that can upconvert a high-definition signal and features an HDMI port. Plug the DVD player in to your new HDTV's HDMI port and see what you've been missing.

Home Theater in a Box. These can get kind of pricey, but your HD experience just isn't complete without a 5.1 or better theater surround system.

Cables. You may think it's a no-brainer to factor cables into your budget, but do some research before you buy the TV. Some cables can really take a bite out of your wallet.

Mounting hardware. If you're getting a flat-panel TV, then don't forget to buy a wall mount or a table stand (if not included). You'll probably need ceiling or floor mounts if you're purchasing a front-projection system. ●



The Perfect Gift

There's an HDTV out there for everybody. Here are a few suggestions that are perfect for anybody on your list.

For the retired couple who plans to spend their Golden Years reconnecting, keep the peace and get them an HDTV that has multiple built-in tuners and picture-in-picture capabilities. That way she can watch her nature specials, and he can watch his World War II programs at the same time.

For new parents, you'll definitely need an HDTV that makes the most of their time. Consider a unit with a built-in DVR, so they can record the programs they want to see and watch them in 20-minute chunks while feeding the little one at three in the morning.

For the dorm- or apartment-dweller, space is everything. Consider an HDTV with a quality built-in sound system. Most HDTVs even have ventriloquist-like virtual surround technology, which can make the audio sound like it's coming from any direction.

For the frequent traveler, keep your eyes peeled for a portable HDTV—if and when one ever comes out, that is. Some of you may think all that extra resolution would be wasted on a handheld screen, but you can bet there are others who are drooling at the thought. ●

entertainment lightly. This widescreen behemoth uses CRT emitters and mirrors to project the HD images on a 52-inch screen.

Front Projection

If you're looking to duplicate the eye-popping, theater-going experience in your own family room, then a front-projection HDTV system is the way to go. Front-projection HDTVs consist of a standalone projector and a separate screen. Mount the projector to the ceiling or set it up on a stand to display video and images big enough to cover your wall. Front-projection systems make use of the same technologies that are found in rear-projection systems, such as LCD, DLP, and LCoS, but because they aren't enclosed in a cabinet, you'll need a fairly decent-sized room and complete control over the room's ambient light to get the best picture quality.

The InFocus IN78EX (\$4,499; www.infocus.com) uses DarkChip3 technology, a variation of DLP technology, to project HD images onto a screen from between five and 20 feet away. Sony recently introduced the VPL-VW50 (\$4,999.99; www.sonystyle.com), which uses three of Sony's proprietary SXRD chips (for red, green, and blue color processing) to produce a vivid HD picture. Sony's front-projector technology is based on LCD microdisplay technology.

Flat Panel

Flat-panel TVs are all the rage. You've seen these thin TVs in sports bars and airports, but you might be surprised that the sleek sets can be yours without setting you back too much. The two types of flat-panel TVs you'll encounter are plasma and LCD.

Because of the technology behind them, Plasma TVs are generally cheaper to produce at sizes measuring 40 inches and up. Plasmas feature excellent **contrast ratios** (the ability to display very bright whites against very dark blacks), wide **viewing angles** (little or no distortion when viewed at an angle), and ultra-fast response times (no streaking or "ghost" images left on-screen during fast transitions from dark and light images). LCD TVs, ranging from 10 to 46 inches and even larger, are capable of producing very bright images, generally have a long lifespan, and are typically more affordable than plasma televisions.

Pioneer's 50-inch PDP-5070HD (\$4,499; www.pioneer-electronics.com) Pure-Vision plasma TV features two HDMI ports, which let you connect multiple HD sources, such as an HD-DVD or BD (Blu-ray Disc) player and an HD-capable DVR. If you're running low on wrapping paper and your gift budget is stretching thin, then check out Philips' 23PF5320/28 LCD HDTV Monitor (\$699.99; www.consumer.philips.com). This compact 23-inch display is proof that sometimes good things do come in small packages. ■

BY ANDREW LEIBMAN

shelf Watch

SIRIUS Stiletto 100
\$349.99 • www.sirius.com

We're pretty excited to see this attractive SIRIUS Stiletto 100, SIRIUS' first live portable satellite radio, and we're hoping to see more like it in 2007.

The Stiletto 100 plays live SIRIUS radio; has Wi-Fi capabilities so you can pick up SIRIUS Internet broadcasts when you're in range; and plays MP3/WMA audio files, as well.

We're also impressed by its 2.2-inch display and 2GB of storage.



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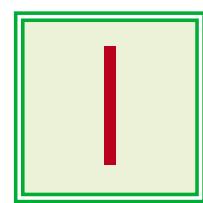
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*except iPod® shuffle. iPod not included.

MP3 Players For The Holidays

Hot Portable Player Options

Toshiba gigabeat V Series • \$399.99 • www.gigabeat.com



It's no surprise that MP3 players are among the most sought-after CE gifts this holiday season. Even the most tech averse among us are becoming tempted by the ubiquitous (and ever more affordable) portable music devices. Carin Clevidence, a 38-year-old Massachusetts-based mother of two—whose only foray into the world of technology is the laptop she's writing her novel on—has put one on her Christmas list.

"I don't even have cable," she says, "but I've asked my husband for an iPod for Christmas. I want to be able to download songs and listen to them."

Whether you're buying for a newbie like Clevidence or for a seasoned veteran of MP3 player technology, there's a player on the market that can satisfy almost anyone with a yen for portable digital audio—and in some cases, video, too.

The iPods

Of course, no discussion of MP3 players is complete without mentioning Apple's tremendously popular iPod (www.ipod.com). Earlier this fall, Apple released new versions of two of its iPods, the shuffle (1GB \$79) and the nano (2GB \$149, 4GB \$199, 8GB \$249) and made some improvements to the video (30GB \$249, 80GB \$349).

The already petite shuffle is now downright minuscule. Just about half the size of the original, the new version is a featherweight that packs a heavyweight punch: It weighs just half an ounce but holds 1GB of songs. The design has been updated to include a built-in clip to make the shuffle wearable, and it's now a cool brushed aluminum. When the player is in shuffle mode, this eponymous feature serves up a continuous mix of songs. (If you'd prefer to control your playlist, you can switch it off.) Like all iPods, the shuffle is compatible with Macs or PCs, but the only music download service it supports is Apple's iTunes (www.itunes.com).

The nano's improvements include an extended battery life (Apple claims it'll give you 24 hours of continuous play), a significantly reduced price-per-gigabyte; a smaller, thinner, lighter design; and, in the 4GB capacity, your choice of four colors: silver, pink, green, or blue. The

Sony S2 Sports Walkman • \$119.95 • www.sonystyle.com

2GB model is available in silver; the 8GB model is offered in black.

The current (fifth-generation) video iPod is essentially the same as the original 5G iPod but features some minor upgrades, including a 2.5-inch color display that Apple says is 60% brighter than the previous video's screen; a new Search and Quick Scroll feature, which makes it easier to find a specific song or video among the tens of thousands it can store; and Auto-Sync technology, which



automatically downloads digital music, podcasts, photos, audiobooks, movies, music videos, and TV shows, and keeps them up-to-date whenever the video iPod is plugged into a computer.

The Other Guys

While Apple's iPod may seem like the only option for the people on your list, this year has seen some impressive alternatives from makers including Creative, Sony, and

Toshiba. The best reason to consider an iPod alternative is freedom. Despite the fact that Apple has historically positioned itself as the computer vendor for the free-thinking, non-corporate, youthful, artistic types, with iPod and iTunes, the company has taken a different tack. If you buy an iPod, you can only obtain downloadable music from iTunes. Of course, the supply is virtually endless—iTunes offers more than 3 million songs, TV shows, and movies—but because nearly all other MP3 vendors

Special Extras

What can you get for the girl who has everything including an MP3 player? Why, accessories, of course. This fall, Apple unveiled some new accessories for the 2G nano, including lanyard headphones (\$39; www.apple.com), an armband (\$29), a dock (\$29), and a compact USB power adapter (\$29). iPod video accessories available from Apple include iPod Hi-Fi (\$349), a camera connector (\$39), and a radio remote (\$49). The new shuffle comes with earphones and a dock and doesn't require a lanyard since it sports a built-in clip, so if you want accessories, go for upgraded earphones (available from Apple for \$19.95 to \$499.95) or the Monster iSplitter for iPod (\$12.95; www.ipod.com), which lets you plug in two sets of headphones at once.

There are over 3,000 accessories available for iPods, but not all iPod accessories are compatible with all iPods. The Kensington RDS FM Transmitter/Car Charger for iPod (\$79.99; www.kensington.com), for example, appears at

first glance, to be compatible with all 30-pin dock iPods, but if you read the fine print, you'll discover that it won't work with any 3G iPods, and some of its features work only with nano and video iPods. Be sure to confirm full compatibility before you buy an iPod accessory.

OtterBox (www.otterbox.com) makes affordable, durable, waterproof boxes including an iPod-specific series, and more generic versions, such as the 2000 (\$17.95) and 2500 (\$20.49), which fit most other players. CaseLogic Universal Pockets (\$9.99; www.caselogic.com) are cute, little neoprene cases built to fit a long list of devices including players from Creative (us.creative.com), SanDisk (www.sandisk.com), and Samsung (www.samsung.com).

Major MP3 player vendors including Creative, Sony (www.sonystyle.com), Toshiba (www.gigabeat.com), iRiver (www.iriver.com), and Cowon (www.cowonamerica.com) also sell accessories for their players at their Web sites. ●

Best Bets

It can be tough to shop for others, particularly when it comes to electronic gadgets. We consider these five gifts to be "best bets." If you opt for one of these, we think your recipient will be delighted—and at the very least, she won't be likely to sneak off to the Returns and Exchanges line at Best Buy the day after Christmas.

iPod shuffle. This little beauty is as sweet and portable as a sugar cube—only more durable. For \$79 it offers ease of use, 1GB of space, and the ever-important cool factor (www.ipod.com).

Creative Zen V Plus. Cute, affordable, and easy to use, this is an excellent introductory player for newbies (or youngsters) with enough features and performance ability to also satisfy more seasoned gadget divas (1GB \$99.99, 2GB \$139.99, 4GB \$179.99; us.creative.com).

Etymotic ER-6 Isolator

Earphones. The next best thing to professional-quality sound but at a price that is music to your ears (\$139; www.etymotic.com).

video iPod. Although there are other truly fantastic MP3 players with video, the iPod video remains the most popular by far, which makes it a safe bet when gift-giving (30GB \$249, 80GB \$349; www.ipod.com).

iTunes. For an iPod lover, an iTunes gift card (\$15, \$25, \$50; www.itunes.com) is a sure winner. ●

offer players that support the other major music download and subscription services, if you want the freedom to shop where you like, you should consider a player from another vendor.

There is also the question of design and features. The best iPod alternatives offer useful features, such as a voice recorder, FM tuner, or pedometer, which iPods don't include.

Among our favorite iPod alternatives is the Creative Zen line of players. The Zen V Plus (1GB \$99.99, 2GB \$139.99, 4GB, \$179.99; us.creative.com) is a compact music and video player with built-in FM radio and 1.5-inch color screen. It includes a line-in port for direct recording from a CD player or another audio device and a voice recorder. The Zen Vision:M (30GB \$249.99, 60GB \$299.99) provides a high-resolution 2.5-inch color screen, FM radio recording, a wake-to-music alarm, password protection, a built-in microphone, and other handy features. It is available in black, white, blue, green, or pink and supports all major music and video-to-go subscription download services. The new Vision:W (30GB \$299.99, 60GB \$399.99) focuses on video features but also serves as a top-rate MP3 player. It boasts a high-resolution 4.3-inch color screen, an AV-out connection, built-in speakers, an FM tuner, and support for audio download services including Yahoo! Music Unlimited and Audible.com.

Sony's S2 Sports Walkman (1GB \$119.95, 2GB \$149.95; www.sonystyle.com) also caught our eye this fall. It breaks from the aspire-to-be-a-credit-card form factor of other brands and goes for a lipstick-tube-like approach. If the person you're shopping for loves to work out to her music, this player is worth a look. Created for athletes, it's water resistant

and includes a calorie-counter, pedometer, stopwatch, and an FM tuner.

Toshiba's gigabeat S (30GB \$299.99, 60GB \$399.99; www.gigabeat.com), is an impressive hard drive player that rivals the video iPod in design, features, and performance. Toshiba's latest release, the gigabeat V (30GB \$399.99) is a media player that emphasizes high-quality video playback and sound quality. If you plan to watch movies on your portable audio device, the gigabeat V is worth considering.

Shopping Basics

Most players fall into a wide price range, with decent-sized flash players available starting at around \$75, and full-featured hard drive-based players with video capabilities topping out over \$400. Don't be wooed by features that may never be used but don't skimp on a player that doesn't have the things you (or your loved one) really want. For instance, don't pay for 60GB of space (roughly 18,000 songs) if half that much (or even less) will do the trick, and don't pay for a player with video if listening to music really is enough. And, remember, if you keep your receipt, you can always take (or send) it back. FG

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

shelf Watch

Altec Lansing inMotion iM510
\$119.95 • www.altec Lansing.com

When you need your hands free for holiday baking, and you'd rather not be tethered to your SanDisk Sansa e200 or c200 music player, pop it into the Altec Lansing inMotion iM510 sound system. Your old holiday favorites will fill your kitchen with lovely sounds to perfectly accompany the delicious aromas of fresh-baked cookies and breads.



Digital Cameras For The Holidays

Focus On Finding The Perfect Camera

Kodak 8MP C875 • \$299.95 • www.kodak.com



D



igital cameras are flying from store shelves. According to research firm The NPD Group, during the first half of 2006, unit sales of compact models were up 19.4% over the same period in 2005. And sales of digital SLR (single-lens reflex) cameras exploded, up nearly 54%. For first-timers and repeat buyers alike, the main lure is more features and better quality at low prices. If someone on your gift list has developed an itchy shutter finger, a new model just might put a smile on her face that's worthy of her first self-portrait. Here are several cameras to consider in your search for the right one.

Budget Cameras

If you have about \$100 to spend and your recipient doesn't need much more than the basics, consider the Fujifilm 5.1MP FinePix A500 (\$129.99; www.fujifilm.com). It has four scene modes to keep things simple (Portrait, Landscape, Sport, and Night), and it's small enough to travel anywhere incognito.

Sony has a good selection of budget point-and-shoot cameras, including the Cyber-shot DSC-W30 (\$229.95; www.sonystyle.com). With its on-screen function guide, this is a good camera for first-timers. It has 32MB of built-in memory in case the user forgets (or fills up) a memory card, and at 6MP, it has enough resolution for big, eye-catching pictures.

Canon has never lacked for great bang-for-the-buck models. A good place to start looking is the 6MP PowerShot A540 (\$279.99; www.usa.canon.com). In addition to automated settings, it features

a manual control option for more-experienced users. It also has a 4X zoom, a bit more powerful than the norm for most compact cameras in this size and price range.



Canon PowerShot A540 • \$279.99 • usa.canon.com

Midpriced Cameras

Panasonic's 5MP Lumix DMC-TZ1 (\$349.95; www.panasonic.com) boasts a powerful 10X optical zoom that will let you cover the same event in wide angle or tight close-up from the same vantage point. It also performs exceptionally well in low light, thanks to two features: an effective image stabilizer and high light sensitivity—up to ISO 1600—that nonetheless manages to suppress the digital noise (colored flecks in darker areas) that often mars high-ISO shots.

For people persons, both Nikon's 8.1MP Coolpix P4 (\$399.95; www.nikonusa.com) and Olympus' 7.1MP SP-320 (\$299.99; www.olympusamerica.com) excel at close-up work . . . even at the macro level. The Nikon has a Face-Priority AF feature that automatically finds and focuses on faces. Further amenities for the Olympus include a whopping 31 shooting modes and the ability to shoot to **RAW files**, a lossless format that preserves all the original detail and permits extensive adjusting in software photo editors.

Accessories In A Snap

So the shutterbug you're shopping for already has a digicam. Maybe you were even the one who took care of that last year. Regardless, it's too soon for an upgrade, and she's perfectly happy with it anyway.

Not to worry. There's a bounty of accessories out there to choose from, any and all of which might make a perfect complement to the camera she's already enjoying.

Memory cards. Because you never know when a photo excursion will go into overtime, you can never have too much storage capacity on hand. SanDisk, one of the leading card manufacturers, offers a huge range of formats and sizes, including the Standard SD Card 1GB (\$54.99; www.sandisk.com).

Just be sure to match the card format to the camera. If it requires a Secure Digital card, but you buy a Compact Flash card, then that means another trip to the store for an exchange.

Camera case. If her camera habitually rattles around loose in her purse or pocket, it's time to quit playing it

dangerously and give that digicam some protection. If she's the streamlined type, a padded sleeve might fit the bill. Or if she has an SLR camera, and/or already has a taste for accessories, she might prefer something roomier. Lowepro, for example, makes an extensive line of camera bags, including the Topload Zoom Mini (\$20.99; www.lowepro.com), a shoulder bag that will hold either a small SLR or a compact digital camera with ample accessory room left over.

Tripod. With many types of photos, from landscapes to macros, the more stable the camera is, the better the shots will look. Even the steadiest human hands will move a little and risk blurring the shot. Bogen Imaging's Manfrotto 728B Digi Tripod With 3-Way Head (\$149; www.bogenimaging.us) provides essential support for compact and SLR cameras and even lightweight camcorders.

Gift certificates. Unless she leaves all her photos as digital files, she'll still need to get them printed. That's where you come in, with a gift certificate to her local photo lab. ●

While we're looking at Olympus, consider its Stylus line for the adventurer on your list. All Stylus models have water-resistant seals and gaskets for all-weather safety. Then there's the 7.1MP Stylus 720 SW (\$399.99), which is waterproof to depths of 10 feet, so you can fearlessly take it into pools, rivers, and oceans. And it can handle a 5-foot drop, too.

If you'd like your camera to do most (or all) of the work, Kodak's 8MP C875 (\$299.95; www.kodak.com) takes automation to a whole new level. You're probably familiar with shooting modes, such as Landscape, Beach, Portrait, and so on, in which the camera optimizes

Best Bets

That no-name camera you noticed on clearance may be temptingly inexpensive. Even so, your recipient (and your reputation) will no doubt be much better off if you spend a little extra on something with a recognizable name. It doesn't even have to set you back that much more. These best bets may make your decision easier:

Canon PowerShot A430
(\$179.99; www.usa.canon.com). A serious little 4MP compact with an entry-level price.

Kodak EasyShare V570 (\$299.95; www.kodak.com). At 5MP, Kodak's first and least-expensive model in its dual-lens line.

Nikon D50 (\$699.95 with lens, \$579.95 body only; www.nikon.com). The D70s' little 6.1MP sibling, and, to our knowledge, the lowest-priced digital-SLR on the market. ●

SLRs (single-lens reflex)
are serious cameras for people
with more than a
casual interest in photography.

its processor for the situation you've chosen. If you like that, then you'll love the C875, which features Kodak's new Smart Scene mode. Just point the camera and it analyzes the scene and picks the best mode for the job.

Kodak has also expanded its innovative dual-lens line, whose models ditch the usual Cyclops look in favor of two specialized lenses: one for wide-angle and another for telephoto. The 6.1MP EasyShare V610 (\$399.95) doubles the original model's zoom to 10X and has built-in Bluetooth capability, which allows wireless transfers.

The Higher End— Digital SLRs

SLRs (single-lens reflex) are serious cameras for people with more than a casual interest in photography. The lenses in digital SLRs are usually superior in quality to those of compact cameras, and because you can change lenses for the photo situation, the cameras' creative flexibility is unmatched.

One of the leaders of the D-SLR pack this holiday season is the latest in Canon's groundbreaking Rebel line, the Digital Rebel XTi (\$899 with lens, \$799 body only). This version ups the specs to 10.1MP, increases the back display size to 2.5 inches,

adds a self-cleaning image sensor, and incorporates Picture Styles, modes that mimic the behavior of different types of task-specific film.

Nikon also remains a solid contender with the 6.1MP D70s (\$999.95 with lens, \$699.95 body only; www.nikonusa.com), whose predecessor, the D70, joined the original Digital Rebel in bringing digital SLRs under the \$1,000 mark.

Point & Shop

With all the cameras to choose from this season, more than one is sure to please. And you may even find that one would make a great present for yourself, as well. FG

BY BRIAN HODGE

shelf Watch

Kingston SDHD 4GB Memory Card
\$199 • www.kingston.com



Spring Break is just around the corner, and if your college-aged daughter is planning a trip to warmer climes, make sure her SD-compatible digital camera has plenty of memory with Kingston's SDHC (Secure Digital High Capacity) 4GB memory card. In addition to hundreds of still photos, your daughter will be able to record MPEG-4 video—you just may not want to see it!

Other Fun Stocking Stuffers

Gift Accessories For Your Gadget Lover

Mobile Edge Monaco • \$99.99 • www.mobileedge.com



T

his is definitely the most wonderful time of the year, so don't waste a minute of it fretting about what to get the special people on your gift lists. When it comes to the holidays, there's an almost endless supply of accessories for gadgets, and we've had fun hunting for innovative gifts and finding some of them at bargain prices. And for shopping ease, you'll find many of the products we've mentioned at your local Best Buy store or at BestBuy.com.

Do the recipients on your holiday gift lists already have digital cameras, photo printers, computers, or game systems? If so, you won't have trouble shopping for them. There are countless accessories for those devices at all prices that'll make thoughtful and well-appreciated gifts.

Photography Gifts

Think of the photo buff in your life who enjoys printing his own pictures; he probably never has enough photo paper, and it can get expensive if he prints a lot of pictures to share with friends and family. So, surprise him with some Kodak Premium Gloss Photo Paper (50 8.5x11 sheets for \$23.99, 60 4x6 sheets for \$8.99; www.kodak.com).

If you know what kind of photo printer he has, you can buy combinations of the

color ink cartridges and photo paper, too. For instance, if he has a Kodak Photo Printer 300 or 500 or one of a number of the Printer Dock series (check the Kodak Web site for compatibility information), the PH-160 Paper & Color Kit (\$49.99) includes a color ink cartridge with enough ink to print the included 160 sheets of 4x6 photo paper. For a more modest gift, consider the PH-40 Paper & Color Kit (\$19.99), which prints 40 pictures.

Don't forget photo-sharing sites, such as Shutterfly (www.shutterfly.com) and Winkflash (www.winkflash.com), for creative ways to make your own favorite photographs into gifts. Upload a picture of your nephew playing his euphonium at the summer band concert to Shutterfly and make 12 personalized 3.5x5 notecards (\$9.99; envelopes included) for his parents.

For your book- and beach-loving mom, you can have a picture of you and your siblings printed on a roomy canvas tote bag (\$16.95) at Winkflash. And for your co-worker who's just crazy about her adorable niece, we'd suggest a microwave- and dishwasher-safe 11oz coffee mug (\$9.95) adorned with a picture of the little one.



Imation Clip Flash Drive • \$29.99 • www.imation.com

Presents For PC Users

Most computer users need extra storage, and you'll find affordable, portable flash drives that'll slip nicely into a stocking. The SanDisk Cruzer Titanium 1GB USB 2.0 Flash Drive (\$69.99; www.sandisk.com) is backward compatible with USB 1.1, so it'll work on a variety of computers. Load the drive with a year of your

family's picture highlights to give to your grandparents for Christmas.

Imation (www.imation.com) is a good source for flash drives, too. The Clip Flash Drive with its carabiner clip design lets a forgetful son attach the drive to his backpack or belt loop. The drives have password protection software, so if he misplaces the drive, no one else will

Don't Forget The Gamers

Games and gaming peripherals are always hot items for the holidays. Take a look at "Games & Gifts" on page 78 for some ideas for new game releases for the Xbox 360, Xbox, PlayStation 2, and Playstation. And handheld gaming devices, such as the PSP (\$199; www.us.playstation.com) and Nintendo DS Lite (\$129.99; www.nintendo.com), are always big sellers that please the little and big kids in your life. See "His & Hers CE" on page 24 to see how distracted Vince and Trista were from their editing this month as they played the DS Lite. See a more in-depth comparison on the PSP's and DS Lite's features in "Kids & Technology" on page 66.

This holiday season gamers are eagerly anticipating the release of Sony's PlayStation 3 (www.us.playstation.com/PS3). It'll have a 30GB (\$499) or 60GB (\$599) hard drive, a read-only Blu-ray Disc drive, HDMI outputs, and Ethernet/Wi-Fi/Bluetooth capabilities so your college-aged gamer can play the less family friendly games in his bedroom.

Don't forget as you shop that kids will be kids, and when they leave their game discs out of the cases, the discs could get smudged and scratched. To help them clean and repair their DVDs and CDs, wrap up the Memorex OptiFix Pro Disc Cleaner & Scratch Remover for CDs, DVDs, and Video Games (\$31.99; www.bestbuy.com). ●

be able to access the data. Drives come in a variety of colors and capacities: 256MB (\$19.99), 512MB (\$29.99), 1GB (\$49.99), and 2GB (\$89.99).

Give the Sudoku addict on your gift list the Imation Sudoku Clip Flash Drive (\$34.99). The 512MB USB drive is loaded with puzzles at four levels of difficulty and is available in teal, neon green, black, or red.

Gift Certificates

Gift certificates take the guess work out of buying gifts. You don't have to worry about whether the gift is the right style, size, or color, and your daughter won't have to battle post-holiday crowds to exchange gifts. With the generous gift certificate you have given her, however, she can take advantage of the sales and buy just the gadget, game, or accessory she wants.

You'll find Best Buy Gift Cards, for instance, in a variety of colors, themes (you can personalize them with photos of your own), and denominations, and there's no expiration date. If you order the cards online, you can opt for denominations of \$15, \$20, \$25, \$30, \$50, \$100, and \$200, and if you're not in a huge hurry to get them, standard shipping in the United States is free. If you buy the cards in a Best Buy store, you can set the amount anywhere between \$5 and \$9,999. Recipients can use the cards at any Best Buy store (or at BestBuy.com) for merchandise or services (such as the Geek Squad—the in-store computer technical support). ●

If your gift recipient is more the sedentary type, he probably doesn't need a portable gift, but there are plenty of other PC peripherals. Maybe typing hurts your father's wrists. He might appreciate a new ergonomic keyboard, such as Microsoft's Natural Ergonomic Keyboard 4000 (\$59.99; www.microsoft.com) with palm rests and customizable Hot Keys, such as one he can program to reply to email and another to launch his browser.

For your sister who lives across the country, or even across the city, try the Logitech BuddyCam 2-Pack Web Cameras (\$79.95; www.logitech.com). She'll keep one camera and give you the other so you can see and talk (courtesy of the built-in microphones) to each other as you're chatting online.

Endless Ideas

As you compile your holiday gift lists, think of your recipients' hobbies and free-time activities. Is your husband into geocaching? Get him the Garmin Rino 530 (\$535.70; www.garmin.com); this lightweight GPS navigation and mapping system provides directions for his on- and off-road escapades, features an electronic compass, and has a two-way radio that's good for up to 14 miles.

If you and your sweetie are planning to go skiing over the holiday break, give him the Motorola Talkabout 8-Mile, 22-Channel FRS/GMRS Two-Way Radios (\$59.99; www.motorola.com). With these two pocket-sized radios, you can keep in touch if he prefers the blue runs to your black diamonds.



Logitech BuddyCam Web Cam • \$79.95 • www.logitech.com

Don't forget the business travelers on your list. Your wife might like a stylish laptop bag, such as the MobileEdge Monaco (\$99.99; www.mobileedge.com) that also has space for her keys, wallet, and cell phone (in a hack-proof security pouch). Its dedicated, padded computer compartment makes retrieving her laptop at airport security points a breeze, too.

We hope these suggestions have furnished you with enough gift ideas so you can finish your holiday shopping early, relax with a cup of eggnog, and enjoy this hap-happiest season of all! FG

BY KATHRYN DOLAN

shelf Watch

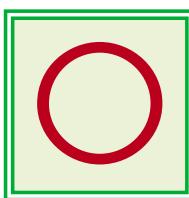
Logitech FreePulse Wireless Headphones
\$99.99 • www.logitech.com

If your teenager wants a little freedom (roughly 33 feet of it), stuff the Logitech FreePulse Wireless Headphones in his stocking. He'll be able to clean his bedroom, bathroom, and maybe even the family room, all while listening to his iPod or MP3 player. Once he plugs the included Bluetooth 2.0 adapter into the digital music player's stereo audio jack, he can enjoy about six hours of uninterrupted listening.



Good Things Come In Small Packages

Stocking Stuffers For Any Budget



nce all of the presents are under the tree, it's time to think about the stockings hanging on the mantel. Most of us spend the majority of our Christmas budget on the larger items under the tree. However, that doesn't mean the stockings have to remain empty. Even with a limited budget, you can choose from a number of CE devices to fill them. Read on to discover a few of the neat gadgets we found.

Dynex Headphone Splitter

\$9.99

www.dynexproducts.com

If you have more than one child in your family, you know how difficult it can be for the kids to share headphones when listening to a CD or watching a movie. Eliminate a few arguments with the Dynex Headphone Splitter. This 3.5mm stereo headphone adapter lets you connect two sets of headphones to the single audio jack on your MP3 player or portable DVD player.



Energizer e² Lithium batteries

\$9.99 for a four pack of

AA or AAA

www.energizer.com

What are the three words you'll often see on electronics' packaging that can dampen the excitement of a new gift? Batteries Not Included. This Christmas, don't forget to include batteries. Energizer's e² Lithium AA and AAA batteries are the longest lasting disposable batteries on the market today. In fact, Energizer claims that the e² Lithium batteries can take up to 630 digital photos, which is up to seven times longer than ordinary alkaline batteries.

Kenneth Cole Reaction Zippered Camera Pouch—Red

\$18.99 • www.bestbuy.com

After finding the perfect new digital camera for your sweetie, don't forget to get a stylish case to go along with it. Kenneth Cole's Reaction Zippered Camera Pouch has a padded compartment to protect your camera and an interior pocket for extra memory cards, batteries, and other accessories. You will find a second zippered pocket on the front of the case for even more storage.



Logitech VX Revolution mouse

\$79.99 • www.logitech.com

The Logitech VX Revolution mouse is sure to please any notebook user in



your family. This wireless mouse has zoom controls, a One-Touch Search button, Document

Flip, and forward/back buttons for Internet browsing. In addition, the scroll wheel has two modes: free-spin and click-to-click. You're probably familiar with click-to-click mode, as this is the method of scrolling found in most mice today. Free-spin mode is different. In the free-spin mode, the wheel can spin without much friction, meaning you can scroll through long documents in no time at all. In fact, we were able to scroll through more than 5,500 lines in an Excel spreadsheet with just one flick of the wheel.

VTech V.Smile Smartridge: Winnie the Pooh: The Honey Hunt

\$19.99

www.vtechkids.com



Winnie the Pooh is a longtime favorite for many of us. Introduce your kids to Pooh with this Smartridge for the VTech V.Smile Learning System. Not only will your kids love playing with Pooh, but also they'll learn the alphabet, colors, counting, numbers, phonics, shapes, and vocabulary at the same time. The Honey Hunt has eight learning adventures and four short arcade-style games. **FG**

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON

Editor's Top 5

Favorite Gifts For The Holiday Season

Santa isn't the only one who is making a list and checking it twice. Although most of it is probably wishful thinking, here are the Top 5 CE devices on my Christmas list this year.

1

Mobile Edge Milano Laptop Bag (\$199.99; www.mobileedge.com).

It's no secret that laptop bags are one of my favorite CE-related items to cover in *First Glimpse*, and the Milano bag from Mobile Edge is among the classiest and most purse-like a girl can buy.



The faux croc exterior is elegant and durable, and the rounded straps (a must-have, in my opinion) make for not-so-sore shoulders at the end of a business trip. The organizational features (cell phone and pen holders, among others) inside the bag are fantastic if you don't want to carry a separate purse, and with a laptop tote this good-looking, who *would* want to?

2

Pioneer PDP-4270HD PureVision Plasma TV (\$3,499; www.pioneerusa.com).

I have to admit that, when it comes to flat-panel TVs, the style of the bezel and stand are often as important to me as the technical specifications. After all, the TV will be constantly visible in my living room, so it should look good, right? That's why I adore the 42-inch Pioneer PureVision: because it looks as good as it performs. The gorgeous black bezel



will make the TV a stunning focal point in any home, and the 720p resolution, impressive black

levels, and spectacular color saturation make this model one of the best (and best-looking) that money can buy.

3

Canon Digital Rebel XTi (\$899.99; usa.canon.com).

I'm the first to admit that I'm not nearly as comfortable with D-SLRs as I am with point-and-shoot digital cameras, but that's why the Canon Digital Rebel XTi is on my list this year: because I want to learn. Considering the growing popularity of entry-level D-SLRs, I'm not alone, either. The XTi's 10.1MP sensor and 2.5-inch LCD are impressive, but the real standout feature is the Self Cleaning Sensor Unit, which prevents errant dust particles (a boon when switching lenses) from mucking up your sensor.



4

Creative Zen Vision:M (\$249.99; www.creative.com).

I have a two-hour daily commute, during which I like to relax and either prepare for or recuperate from a busy day at the office. A video MP3 player is

perfect for such situations, and one of the best in that group of devices is the Zen Vision:M. The screen resolution (320 x 240) is incredible, and I also love the FM tuner for my news programs. The most exciting feature, though, is the Vision:M's support for the TiVoToGo service, where users can transfer TV shows they've recorded with their TiVo and watch them on the 2.5-inch LCD.

5

TiVo Series2 180GB Dual Tuner DVR (\$130 with service plan; www.tivo.com).

As many of you unfortunately know, "The Office" is on at the same time as "Ugly Betty" on Thursday nights. If I happen to be busy during that time, I can record both at once with TiVo's dual-tuner DVR. The TiVo's Ethernet port makes it easy to connect to your home network, or you can transfer shows to your compatible MP3 or digital media player. It has 180 hours of storage capacity, so I can record "Grey's Anatomy," too. **FG**



BY KATIE SOMMER

Lifestyle Close-Up Tips

Find The Perfect Gift



Consider The Recipient

There's one in every family: the guy who gives you the gift *he* really wanted instead of what *you* really wanted. When choosing gifts for family and friends this holiday season, make sure you don't make the same mistake. Remember that grandma's probably not as interested in the latest, greatest, fastest gadget as she is in a user-friendly digital camera. If you are careful to give something you know the recipient actually wants or needs,

and technologies.

Keep It Simple

Does she want the leopard print or Hello Kitty phone cover? It's anyone's guess, so unless you have a specific request from someone you know very well, it's best to stick with the base product and leave the additional features and accessories to your recipient. Sure, it can be tempting to go all out on some gifts, but in this case less is usually more.

you can rest assured that your gift will garner a huge smile rather than end up at the top of the returns list.

Research Has Its Rewards

A well-informed buying decision will ensure you get the most bang for your buck. Sites such as PriceGrabber.com will help take a lot of the leg-work out of your search for the perfect gift at the right price. The site helps you compare prices on computer parts, peripherals, electronics, and more from one location. Not sure which model to get? Unless you know for sure that the intended recipient wants a specific older model, it's usually best to go with the newest model available, which offers the latest upgrades

Gift Certificates

It's pretty tough these days to find a store that doesn't issue gift certificates. That's because there aren't many people who don't like them. Sure, they can be a tad impersonal, so if you're looking for something special for your sweetie, a gift certificate probably isn't it. But if you have a gadget lover on your list and aren't quite sure what toy he's into now, a gift certificate from the local electronics store is sure to go over well. Certificates also work well for the person who has everything or the super picky shopper. Better to let these types choose on their own than guess wrong.

Contractual Concerns

Keep in mind that some devices, such as cell phones and XM and SIRIUS satellite radios, come with monthly subscription fees and contracts that can be lengthy. If you are buying someone such a device, think about how you are going to handle the continuing financial obligation. Will the recipient assume full responsibility for the monthly fees? Is he or she willing and able to do that? If not, you should consider whether you are going to pay for some or all of the fees as part of the gift. This is especially important if you're a parent giving your child a cell phone, for example. You'll want to decide beforehand who's going to foot those monthly bills. **FG**

BY JENNIE SCHLUETER

Digital Studio Shopping Tips

The Right Features, The Right Digital Camcorder

The most recent digital camcorder features put professional-quality video within reach of the average consumer. Enhancements such as high-definition picture quality, image stabilization, and long-range optical zoom also add to the laundry list of available features and make choosing a digital camcorder a bit intimidating. Cut this helpful page out and use it on your next shopping trip.

Video shot from a distance, such as at a child's soccer game or school play, is more compelling if you can use the camcorder's optical zoom to single your subject out of a large group. With an optical zoom capability of 20X or 30X, you could make the subject appear 20 or 30 times larger than the digital camcorders standard focal length (not using the zoom at all). Don't pay attention to a camcorder's digital zoom capability as much as optical zoom when you shop. Digital zoom magnifies the pixels in an image and can result in shaky and fuzzy video that's distracting to watch; it's best to avoid using it altogether.

You can reduce shaky video by purchasing a digital camcorder with optical image stabilization or by placing the camera on a tripod. Optical image stabilization uses gyroscopic technology to compensate for high-frequency vibration, and it is especially useful to steady your video in situations where a tripod would either be too cumbersome or take up too much space. Digital image stabilization also helps you shoot smooth video, but it can degrade your recording quality because it shifts the pixels in an image to compensate for shaky video.

Consider investing in an HD digital camcorder to ensure your investment is future-proofed. If you play video shot with a standard digital camcorder on an HDTV, you'll notice a difference between the quality of your video and the hi-def content you're used to seeing. HDTVs also display a widescreen aspect ratio of 16:9. Consider purchasing a digital camcorder capable of recording the widescreen format, because HDTVs either stretch the 4:3 aspect ratio to fill the 16:9 frame or cut off the top and bottom of the 4:3 aspect ratio.

Once you determine the features that are important to you, visit an electronics retailer to find a digital camcorder you feel comfortable using with the features you need. Make sure you can feel how the camcorder fits in your hand. Ask a salesperson if you can test a camcorder and make sure it's comfortable to use all the features. For instance, if you have small hands and your thumb can't reach the Record button on a certain camcorder, don't purchase it—even if it has the features you want.

BY NATHAN LAKE

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

What is the digital camcorder's optical zoom capability?

- 10X
- 15X
- 20X
- 25X
- 30X

What kind of image stabilization does it offer?

- Optical image stabilization
- Digital image stabilization
- No stabilization

Which picture quality does the digital camcorder capture?

- HD picture quality
- Standard picture quality

What aspect ratio or ratios can it capture?

- 16:9 (widescreen)
- 4:3 (standard)
- Records 16:9 or 4:3

Notes

CUT HERE

Shelf Watch

Movavi VideoStudio
\$59.99 • movavi.com/suite

After you've captured your video, you may want to edit it on your Windows-based computer. In addition to ripping, splitting, copying, burning, and more, with Movavi VideoStudio you can save your videos to a mobile device, such as an iPod, PSP, PDA, or cell phone, by clicking Convert. You can add video and audio clips, soundtracks, special effects, and still photos to your film, too.



The Year's Best Digital Camcorders

The Cream Of The Crop From A Very Good Year

If digital camcorders get any more popular, pretty soon we're going to be seeing people with one strapped to each hand. Sure, they still make great gifts for families—especially newlyweds and first-time parents—but camcorders have gone way beyond that now. They're also indispensable tools for video bloggers, activists, students seeking an avenue of self-expression, and all sorts of creative and gonzo journalist types hoping to produce the next Internet video sensation.

Over the last couple of years, digital camcorders have emerged as a mature technology and a cultural force. If you doubt the latter, just pay a visit to YouTube (www.youtube.com).

It all comes down to the technology and its ease of use. With more features (some of which trickled down from high-end professional models) at better prices than ever, camcorders have reached that point at which

we have to ask: If you want one but have not yet gone shopping, what are you waiting for?

Here are a few of the features in the latest camcorders that push our buttons in all the right ways.

Hard drives. This is great outside-the-box thinking, except the benefits are actually farther inside the box than ever before. Camcorders with built-in hard drives let you shoot for hours, rather than worrying about replacing digital tapes or recordable DVDs, which are generally good for just 60 or 30 minutes, respectively, of high-quality footage.

Improved image quality. This doesn't comprise a single feature, but a variety of ways manufacturers deliver better-looking video: improved optics, increased resolution for HDTV viewing, refinements in image processing circuitry, and 3CCD (charge-coupled device) designs, which use a separate image sensor for each primary color rather than a single sensor for the entire image.

Surround-sound microphones. Here's another feature ready for the high-definition TV future. Rather than capturing audio in traditional left/right stereo format, we're seeing the emergence of 5.1 microphones—the same multi-channel configuration that you'll find on most commercial DVDs.

Image stabilization. This is another under-the-hood technology that's steadily been refined. The cinema-verité jitters of a handheld camera can lend an edgy immediacy to the right kind of material, but that's probably not what you have in mind for a baby shower. A good stabilizer will smooth out the bumps and twitches of normal use.

Granted, it may be a while before you routinely find all of these features on the same model. In the meantime, here are some great camcorders that are leading the way. We've kept it to list prices under \$1,000; you could spend thousands and have the features to show for it, but that's beyond the needs of most users. **FG**

BY BRIAN HODGE



Panasonic PV-GS500 MiniDV • \$999.95 • www.panasonic.com

Canon Elura 100 MiniDV

\$399 • www.canonusa.com

Why we love it. The Elura 100 is a holy grail for bargain hunters, giving you a lot of features for your money. It's ready for widescreen, including the 2.7-inch flip-out display, and Canon has always been a leader at digital-image processing.

It also has a powerful optical zoom, with 20X magnification. That's about as far as most people can push it without needing a tripod to stabilize the image, although the electronic stabilization can help compensate a bit.

For picky directors, when you don't feel like automation, there's a good amount of manual control, including manual focus using the joystick, which feels pretty intuitive.

The standout feature. True 16:9 widescreen for an economical price. Some camcorders fake a widescreen aspect ratio by cropping a standard 4:3 image. Not this one. The Elura 100 maximizes the area of the image sensor used, so widescreen images are composed of more pixels (up to 880,000) than the standard format (690,000).

The bottom line. This is a terrific bang-for-the-buck camcorder for those who like to watch their budget as closely as their videos.

Panasonic PV-GS500 MiniDV

\$999.95 • www.panasonic.com

Why we love it. We mentioned features that trickle down from high-end units, and this camcorder has a great one. The PV-GS500 packs the same 3CCD technology that was first used in professional broadcast cameras.

The lens comes from one of the world's best makers, Leica, and you can manually adjust it with a focus ring, rather than the awkward buttons sometimes found on other models. And if changing MiniDV cassettes mid-shoot is going to be a hassle, you can connect a FireWire or USB 2.0 cable and shoot directly to your laptop or computer's hard drive.

We also appreciate its solid build, but that's a warning, too: At around 1.6 pounds, this isn't a flyweight unit that you'll hardly know is in your hand.

The standout feature. We like that 3CCD design, with an image sensor for each of the three primary colors—red, green, and blue. Separate color processing yields better color quality and image sharpness, regardless of what mode you're shooting in.

The bottom line. The PV-GS500 is one of the best camcorders you're going to find this side of the professional market, at well below a professional price.

Sony DCR-DVD405 Handycam

\$799.99 • www.sonystyle.com

Why we love it. Superb image quality meets 5.1 surround-sound capability that's pretty effective for a built-in microphone. And if you want to do even better, an accessory shoe will let you add your own mic (or lighting attachment).

As you might suspect from looking at the model number, this camcorder records to DVD-R/RWs. Although you'll change discs about twice as often as you would MiniDV cassettes—every half-hour or so at higher quality settings, it's great for those who like the convenience of going straight to the DVD player or PC.

We also like the highly informative readout for remaining battery life, and the camcorder incorporates a couple of Sony standards that we've come to love: the Super NightShot Infrared System, an excellent aid for low- or no-light shooting, and a touchscreen LCD display, which makes navigating the menus a breeze.

The standout feature. Rather than a standard CCD sensor, this camcorder uses an Advanced HAD (Hole Accumulation Diode) CCD imager. It boosts the amount of light that hits the sensor for a cleaner image with less digital "noise." You'll never see this feature, but you'll be glad it's there.

The bottom line. This one's a solid choice for video enthusiasts looking for a smart blend of quality and convenience.

Sony DCR-SR100 Handycam

\$999.99 • www.sonystyle.com

Why we love it. What's not to love about a camcorder that lets you forget about keeping spare recording media ready, so you can just concentrate on shooting? That's the benefit of shooting to a built-in hard drive.

You might not love it much if the image quality wasn't so hot, which is why we recommend that if you're going for a hard-drive-based camcorder, Sony's models should be at the top of your list. It has integrated the technology well into its latest camcorders. As with the DCR-DVD405, this one uses an Advanced HAD CCD, and the picture gets thumbs-up.

Further endearments include 5.1 surround-sound, and the standard touchscreen display and Super Night-Shot Infrared.

The standout feature. The 30GB hard drive. Even at the highest quality mode, you can accumulate over seven hours of footage before you need to think of offloading it to your computer. Yet for all that capacity, it's quite compact, at just under 6 inches long.

The bottom line. The DCR-SR100 offers one of the best integrations of high-quality and forward-looking features that you'll find south of the \$1,000 mark.



Sony DCR-DVD405 Handycam
• \$799.99 • www.sonystyle.com

Photography Technique Tip

Night Photography



Water fountains are beautiful, especially at night. We used an aperture of f/5 and slowed the shutter speed to capture the water and nearby building at night.

There's something eternally appealing about a city's skyline at night. Perhaps the allure stems from the way the lights from office buildings hang like modern versions of stars in the sky. Whether you want to capture the beauty of your city's skyline or if you're taking pictures of your house decorated with Christmas lights, nighttime photography can present some challenges.

If you've ever tried to capture a photo of a building or skyline at night using an automatic setting on your camera, you've probably received one of two

results: an extremely overexposed or extremely underexposed picture. As a result, you know the automatic setting on many cameras won't cut it. But most cameras also have manual settings that you can tweak so those night shots will come out beautifully.

First things first: switch to manual mode in order to have full control over your camera. Next, consult your camera's user guide for instructions on turning off the flash and changing the aperture and shutter speed. For evening photography, you won't need to use your camera's internal flash. Instead, you'll want to change the aperture and shutter speed to allow your camera to

capture a greater amount of the available light.

Aperture controls the size of the lens opening that light passes through. We use f-stop numbers, such as f/5.6 and f/8, to describe various aperture settings. Shutter speed controls the length of time the shutter is open and able to capture light for an exposure, and the amount is expressed in seconds and fractions of a second. Shutter speed and aperture go hand-in-hand: If you change one, you'll want to change the other to find a combination that works for your situation and correctly exposes your picture.

Because you'll use longer shutter speeds while taking photos at night, you'll need a tripod to steady your camera. Your camera's shutter will be open for a relatively long time; it is very difficult, if not impossible, to hold your camera perfectly still during that period.

A good aperture to start with is f/4 or f/5.6. This will give you an acceptable depth of field while still letting in enough light for the photo. Next, adjust shutter speeds up or down until you're satisfied with your shot. The correct shutter speed will vary depending on the amount of light available in each situation, so you might have to snap a few shots before you get something you're happy with. A longer shutter speed will result in greater light reaching the camera's sensor and therefore a more brightly lit shot. Conversely, short shutter speeds limit the amount of light reaching the sensor and result in darker shots. Because the LCD on your camera won't be as true-to-life as the print, it's always a good idea to take an extra shot past the setting you believe to be optimal. For example, if you were increasing shutter speeds until you found the right setting, try one more shot with the next longer shutter speed. **FG**

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON

tips

Macro Photography

1

Macros With A Compact

If you're using a compact camera, you'll likely be limited to its onboard capabilities regarding magnification and focusing at close distances. However, many of them also have macro presets that let you get as close as an inch away from your subject. Just be sure to frame your shot using the display screen rather than the optical viewfinder, if the camera has one. On a compact model, the viewfinder sees things from a slightly different perspective than the lens. When you're extremely close to your subject, a shot that looks properly framed in the viewfinder will end up shifted over and down, perhaps cutting off part of the subject.

2

Macros With A Digital-SLR

A D-SLR will provide the greatest flexibility for macro work, letting you change lenses and accessories as needed. Some standard zoom lenses have a macro setting, but if you decide to invest in a specialized macro lens, a focal length of 90 to 105mm will be the most versatile, working well in a variety of close-up situations. If you're watching your budget, try an extension tube, which attaches between the camera body and a standard lens, increasing its magnification power and letting you move in closer than the lens would otherwise allow. Check with your camera's manufacturer for extension tubes that will work with your model.

3

Shoot On Three Legs

When shooting on a macro scale, it's vital to keep the camera as still as possible because the effect of even a tiny hand movement will be magnified compared to a wider shot. Also, it will be much easier to achieve and maintain the precise focus you want. This makes a tripod essential. A standard tripod will work fine if you're shooting subjects around waist level and above, such as flowers. But if you're shooting ground level subjects you'll need a shorter tripod such as the Benbo Mini Trekker (\$79.95; www.patersonphotographic.com), which has an adjustable center column that can swivel like a boom to position the camera right above the ground.

4

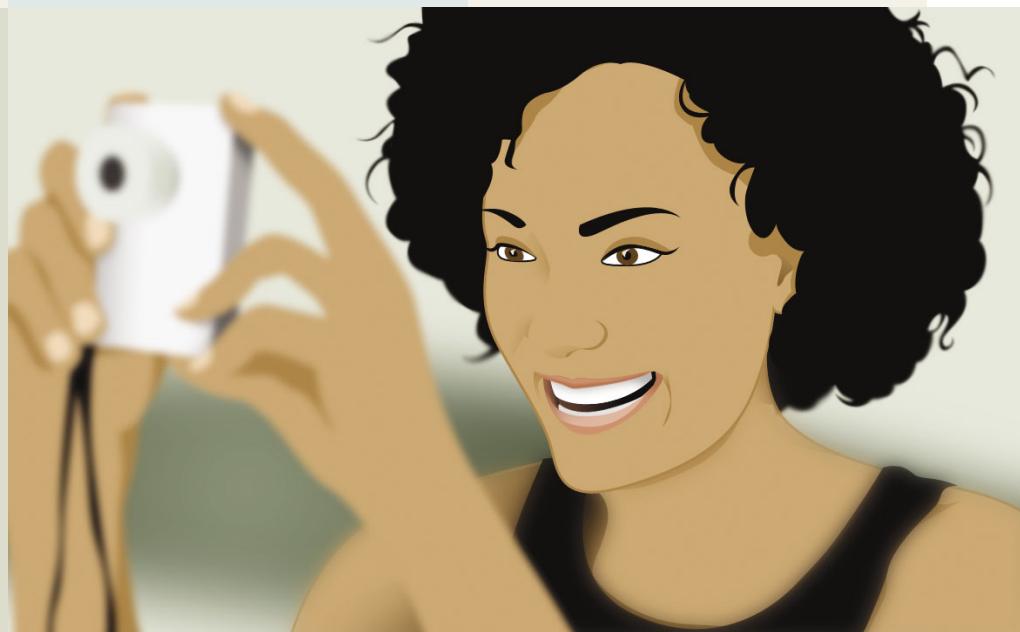
Small Subject, Small Aperture

The camera's aperture setting determines depth of field (the range of the photo that's in acceptably sharp focus). For most macro shots, you'll get the best results with a narrow aperture, which means setting the F-stop to a high numerical value. In landscapes and other expansive shots, a narrow aperture is used to create a long depth of field. However, when the lens is quite close to the subject, even background objects an inch away can blur. A narrow aperture will provide enough depth of field so your entire subject is in focus and appears sharply defined against a blurry background.

5

Need For Speed

If there's any possibility your subject will move—say, you're shooting a blossom in a breeze or a scuttling insect—counteract it with a fast shutter speed of 1/250th of a second or higher. Widening the aperture will admit more light for a quicker exposure, but avoid that if possible. Instead, raise the camera's ISO value (400, 800, etc.) to increase its light sensitivity.



BY BRIAN HODGE

CE@Home

Shopping Tips

Buy A Home Stereo

BY ANDREW LEIBMAN

W

hen shopping for a home stereo, you can expect to pay anywhere from \$30 to \$30,000. With such a range of choices available, it's not difficult to blow your budget and get overwhelmed. To shop smart, tear out this article and refer back to it as you shop.

First, decide where you want to use your new home stereo. You'll be shopping for vastly different audio systems if you want to add some sonic ambiance to the kitchen, rock out to your MP3 collection in a dorm room, or recreate the theater-going experience in the family room. Home-theater systems and mix-and-match speakers and receiver systems are designed to connect to your TV and envelop the room with sound. Smaller environments can benefit from a micro system, under-the-counter CD or DVD player, or compact speakers that you can connect to an MP3 player.

Consider aesthetics. If your home stereo system is going to be in your kitchen, then buy something as discreet and out-of-the-way as possible. If you're adding a new system to a meticulously designed family room, find something that won't derail the décor.

Make sure your components play nice. If you plan to mix-and-match your home stereo system by purchasing a separate receiver, speakers, and other components, then make sure they share power capabilities, such as wattage and resistance to the flow of electrical current, otherwise known as impedance (measured in ohms). This ensures your assembled home stereo is pumping out the best possible sound.

Bring your own music and other media to the retail show room. The best way to choose a home stereo is to test each model you're considering with the music and audio you plan to listen to on a regular basis. Also, make a list of the media you want your home stereo to be able to play and take it with you to the store (see the Shopping Checklist). If you're shopping for your main home stereo, you'll probably want your new system to be able to play all of your existing media, such as records, tapes, CDs, DVDs, and MP3s.

Be picky. Once you narrow your choices to a few top performers, compare the prices and features. Don't feel like you have to make a decision at the store. Check the Internet for reviews from people who purchased the models you're considering and carefully weigh the pros and cons.

Don't forget the extras. Almost any home stereo you purchase is going to need an accessory or two to get it to work with your existing equipment. Make sure you purchase your equipment knowing full well what other add-ons, cables, and hardware you'll need to make it work in your space.

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

How many speakers does the stereo include?

- None
- One
- Two
- Three
- Five
- Six
- Seven

What extra features and accessories does the stereo include?

- Speaker wire
- Remote
- Wall mounts
- Floor stands
- Wireless speakers
- Multi-disc changer

What types of audio does the stereo play?

- Stereo audio and video content (tapes and CDs)
- 6-channel or better audio and video content (DVDs)
- Satellite radio
- AM/FM radio
- MP3s
- Other

Notes

 CUT HERE

Gift Of The Month

FLY Pentop Computer



et's face it. Kids are always on the go. In addition to school-work, they have sporting events, after-school activities, and social calendars to balance. Wouldn't it be nice if there were a tool you could provide for a student in your life that could help her keep it all together? And what if that tool could provide entertainment and help with her studies to boot?



The FLY Pentop Computer (\$99.99; www.flypentop.com) from LeapFrog offers just that by putting the power of a computer in the palm of your hand. And although we usually stick to a pretty tight \$50 budget when selecting our Gift Of The Month, we decided that our find for December was too good not to share. After all, the holidays are the perfect time to spoil those you love just a little.

Practical & Playful

Computers are everywhere you turn. Most families have at least one at home; you probably use one at work; and your kids—from grade school to college—more likely than not use them on a daily basis in the classroom. As nice as it would be for every child to have access to his own laptop or PDA, it's not practical for everyone. But, with the FLY Pentop, a student in your life could have access to many of the benefits of a mobile computer without the expense.

The FLY comes loaded with a Calculator, Scheduler, Notepad, FLYtones, BuzzPhrase, FLYmatch, plenty of games, and more. Although there is additional FLYware available to expand the functionality of the FLY Pentop, it offers more than enough out-of-the-box for any student to get started. With FLYware and accessories starting at just \$4.99, think of all the future gift possibilities you'll have lined up.

FLY Technology

The unit uses an optical scanner positioned above the writing tip to "read" what you've written on special dot-matrix FLY Paper. (The FLY comes with 35 sheets of paper, plus many of the educational software titles come with additional paper, and you can purchase packs of FLY Paper separately.) The dots on the FLY Paper let the computer chip inside the FLY keep track of where it is on the page, so it can process what's

written, which means you can draw a calculator and actually use it, write notes to play back later, and so much more.

Two of our favorite FLY features are Scheduler and FLYtones. With Scheduler, simply write a date, time, and event, and when that time arrives, you'll receive an audible reminder from your FLY Pentop. It's like having a PDA that you don't have to remember to check. To have some fun, select FLYtones, draw a keyboard and drum set on a piece of FLY Paper and compose and record your own music. You can even save your musical creations to play back later.

Whatever his needs or activities, the student who receives the FLY Pentop Computer from you will surely be grateful. And, perhaps, when he wins the Nobel Prize one day, he'll even remember to thank you for helping him get his start. 

BY JOY MARTIN



DS Lite • \$129.99 • www.nintendo.com

Kids & Technology

Sony PSP & Nintendo DS Lite

A

nd then there were two.

Sony and Nintendo are the last two companies standing in the hand-held video game market, according to In-Stat (www.instat.com), a marketing analysis corporation. Gaming devices such as the Nokia N-Gage and Tapwave Zodiac are off the market. And the last of the popular Nintendo Game Boys will be shipped next year.

That leaves the Sony PSP (PlayStation Portable) and the Nintendo DS Lite as the only viable competitors in the hand-held gaming field.

Sometimes competing devices have such similar features it's difficult to distinguish between the two. But that's not the

case with the PSP and DS Lite. Once you take a closer look, you'll see how differently they appeal to kids who like to play games.

Clear Differences

If you're considering buying a portable gaming device, you won't need to do hours of research on dozens of devices. Your choice will come down to the PSP and DS Lite.

The differences between the two are pretty clear. If your gamer just wants to play games, our nod goes to the DS Lite. But if she wants a portable gaming system plus media player, then the PSP is the obvious choice. Check both of them out to see for yourself. **FG**

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

SONY PSP

Games & More

The Sony PSP (\$199.99; www.us.playstation.com) is much more than a gaming device. You can use it to watch movies, go online, listen to music, and view digital photos.

Powered by a Li-Ion battery, the PSP plays games stored on UMDs (Universal Media Discs), a storage format Sony developed specifically for this gaming device. The PSP's read-only UMD disc drive can play games, movies, music videos, or any other content stored on these discs.

The PSP has built-in stereo speakers, 32MB of memory, a mini-B USB 2.0 port, and Wi-Fi capabilities. In fact, up to 16 PSPs can engage in wireless competition simultaneously, depending on the game, using the Ad Hoc Mode. Or, use the Infrastructure Mode to connect the PSP to a wireless LAN and play against other gamers online, or download game updates and related game content, such as trailers and wallpaper.

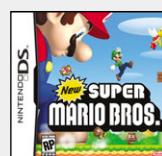
The PSP comes in black and is a slim 2.9 x 6.7 x .9 inches (HxWxD). More important to gamers, the 4.3-inch screen displays images in the 16:9 widescreen format. With the included battery, it's still less than a pound.

If you buy just the PSP system, you get an AC adapter and battery pack. However, for a bit more money, the PSP Value Pack (\$249.99) includes all that plus headphones with remote control, carrying pouch, wrist strap, cleaning cloth, and the biggie—a 32MB Memory Stick Duo, which essentially doubles the storage capacity of the PSP. Use the Memory Stick to store photos and MP3 or other music files.

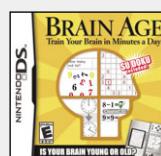
Another option is the new PSP Entertainment Pack (\$249.99), which Sony released with holiday shoppers in mind. Along with the PSP, you get the "ATV OffroadFury: Blazin' Trails" game, the "Lords of Dogtown" UMD movie, and a 1GB Memory Stick Pro Duo.

Top 5 Games

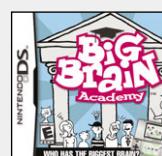
If you surprise someone with a portable gaming system this holiday season, be prepared to follow up with one or more of the most popular games. These are the best-selling games for handheld systems, listed with publisher and rating.



New Super
Mario Bros.
System: DS
Publisher: Nintendo
Rating: E



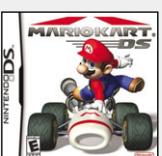
Brain Age:
Train Your Brain
In Minutes a Day
System: DS
Publisher: Nintendo
Rating: E



Big Brain
Academy
System: DS
Publisher: Nintendo
Rating: E



Madden
NFL 07
System: PSP
Publisher: EA Sports
Rating: E



Mario Kart
System: DS
Publisher: Nintendo
Rating: E

NINTENDO DS LITE

Unique Interactivity

Nintendo has a good track record in the portable gaming system arena, as its popular Game Boy and DS systems showed. Its latest system, the DS Lite (\$129.99; www.nintendo.com), is proving to be just as popular, especially because this system has a special slot that lets users insert Game Boy Advance games and play those. In addition, the DS Lite plays games designed for the DS. (See "Top 5 Games" sidebar below.)

In addition to its backward-compatibility, two other features of the DS Lite make this system very appealing, and both enhance interactivity with games. The first is the system's dual screens. Both screens are 3 inches, can display 3D views, and are adjustable to four levels of brightness. The bottom display also has touchscreen technology and responds to either the included stylus—which stores neatly on the back of the DS Lite—or your finger. A screen cover protects the lower screen, so durability shouldn't be an issue.

A second unique feature is the built-in microphone, which means users can interact audibly with games.

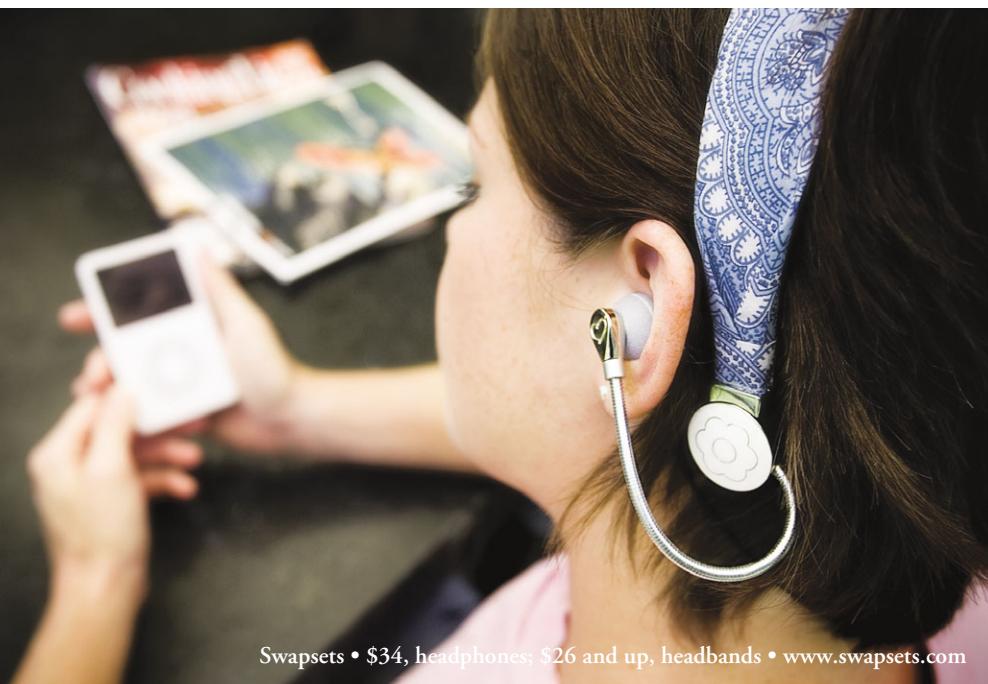
Thanks to its Wi-Fi capabilities, DS Lite users can compete wirelessly with as many as 15 other players, at distances of up to 100 feet. However, only one game card is needed for these multiplayer sessions. And with the embedded PictoChat software, all these players can engage in a big chat session, too.

The DS Lite is a bit sleeker than the PSP—only 2.9 x 5.2 x .85 inches when closed—and is available in three colors: polar white, coral pink, and onyx. It comes with an AC adapter (which is not interchangeable with other Nintendo portable gaming systems), a Li-Ion battery, and a cartridge cover slot, which will keep the Game Boy slot clean when not in use. Each of these items also can be purchased separately as replacement items, as can the stylus (\$5.99 for a two pack).

Source: The NPD Group & The Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences

Get Organized

Take Control Before The Holidays Take Over



Swapsets • \$34, headphones; \$26 and up, headbands • www.swapsets.com

We understand your frustration. You'd like to get more organized, but you need more time. Or more money. Or an extra pair of hands. Getting organized is a chore, but one that is necessary and satisfying. With the holidays lurking, don't wait until they are upon you before making your life and your stuff more orderly.

We can't give you more of the things you need, but we can introduce you to a few nifty products that will help you use your time efficiently, monitor your expenses, and free your hands to accomplish more tasks (see the "Swapsets" sidebar).

Digital Duties

Duty calls the family photographer, usually the wife/mom. Not that we mind, of course, but preserving family memories isn't always, well, a snap.

You have to make sure you have fresh batteries; space on the memory card; and time to upload, label, and edit the pictures—all before you decide which pictures to print and send to your friends and family. Finally, you have to arrange the photos and display them in albums or memory books or at photo Web sites such as Shutterfly (www.shutterfly.com) or SnapFish (www.snapfish.com).

Before you get snap happy with your camera this holiday season as you visit friends and family, make sure you're prepared for all that being the family photographer entails.

We're used to labeling our photos by date or event, but have you ever considered organizing them by location? Users of Sony cameras, such as the 7.2MP Sony Cyber-shot DSC-T10 (\$399.95; www.sonystyle.com), can take advantage of a new product from the company to identify and track the physical location of the images they've taken.

The Sony GPS-CS1 (\$149.95) is a compact, lightweight GPS device that captures time and location data from all your travels, whether it's a weekend at Granny's or a winter getaway to the tropics. Use the included USB cable to import that information to your computer; GPS Image Tracker software, which comes with the GPS-CS1, synchronizes your uploaded pictures—through the camera's time stamp feature—with the captured GPS data.

Next, activate the Picture Motion Browser software bundled with newer

Sony digital cameras and camcorders. This program gives you access to an online mapping site provided by Google Maps. With this software, you can add your photos and their coordinates to the map so you can show off your travels on the Web. Virtual thumbtacks will pinpoint the latitude and longitude and the time each photo was taken.

Another handy organizer for the family photographer is a 16MB Memorex FlashDisc (\$14.99 for a three-pack; www.memorex.com). This storage device is ideal for sharing digital photos or other files. Simply attach it to a USB port, and you can load about 40 images on the disc.

The unique shape—flat and circular, compared with many tubular-shaped USB drives—means you can easily snail

mail a FlashDisc, if necessary. And at \$5 each, you won't be concerned about getting a disc back. It's cheaper than printing out 40 photos on your own.

When it comes to displaying your photos, get some help creating a beautiful photo book, designed to reflect the theme of the images.

When it comes to displaying your photos, get some help creating a beautiful photo book, designed to reflect the theme of the images. PhotoWorks (www.photoworks.com) is an online service that will incorporate your photos in a variety of printed and bound book styles. For special occasions, choose the Metropolitan (\$15.95 and up), graced with faux leather and suede. The Photo Clutch (\$39.95 and up) includes a leather cover and small handle. The Everyday album (\$12.95), with center-cut front cover, is suitable and affordable for giving to many friends and family.

Beyond the book's style, you can choose from a number of themes, including sporting events, parties, weddings, births, and vacations. Themes are reflected in the page colors and designs.

Finances Matter

The sobering financial reality usually hits us mid-January—that's when we have to

Swapsets: Function & Style Meet Head-On

Steffi Thomas created her female-friendly headsets and headphones from necessity. As a new mom, she was frustrated with ill-fitting earbuds, and she had a desperate need for more hands. The unattractive headsets on the market at the time were a huge turn-off.

Thus were born Swapsets, stylish, interchangeable headsets (\$30; www.swapsets.com), headphones (\$34), headbands (\$26 and up), and dangles (\$8 and up—accessories that look like dangling earrings and clip to the headphones and headbands) that free women to listen to or talk on devices without tying up their hands or making them look like a geek. Visit the Swapset Web site and assemble a look from Steffi's colorful collection—each item is sold separately. Or, choose a package set (\$60 and up), which comes with a travel bag and small purse.

Headbands feature rose herringbone, denim, and plum floral corduroy patterns, and the headsets/phones and dangles come in complementary colors and designs. If you're not sure what ensemble looks best, check the Steffi Suggests section at the bottom of the site. ●

PDAs: The Ultimate Organizers

Getting organized begins with keeping all pertinent information at our fingertips. And you can do that with a PDA.

Swap out your purse-size calendar covered with sticky notes for the compact Palm Z22 (\$99; www.palm.com). This 3.4-ounce handheld holds your daily, weekly, and monthly schedules, to-do lists, and your address and phone books. You can organize info by color-coded categories—one color for work, another for family, for example—and set alarms to remind you of appointments or to send birthday cards to friends.

The Find function lets you enter a name or event and then it displays all

the places in the PDA in which that term appears. And the Synch button lets you automatically synchronize information between the Z22 and your notebook or desktop PC.

For women who need more business-related help, but still want a PDA for personal use, the Palm TX (\$299) fills the bill. Its Bluetooth and Wi-Fi functions let you search the Web and check email on the fly. The 128MB of memory gives you room for Word and Excel documents, family photos and video clips, MP3 files, and ebooks. To find a good ebook, visit the Palm eBook store (ebooks.palm.com), which carries more than 17,000 titles. ●



Voya 350 • \$429.99 • www.averatec.com

start paying for all the gifts we bought and parties we attended or hosted during the holidays.

Take control of your finances before the flurry of holiday spending begins with Quicken Deluxe 2007 (\$49.99; www.quicken.intuit.com). Use the interactive calendar to track when you need to pay bills to avoid late fees and finance charges. Balance your checkbook and reconcile your bank statements. Save time and postage by paying your bills online; more than 4,000 financial institutions work with Quicken, so you can also use this program to access your banking and credit card information.

Charting your spending habits can help curb problem spending. With one click, Quicken Deluxe can generate reports and charts that illustrate where your money is going and keep track of your spending averages in any given area.

For more help, use the budget tool to create a spending plan for each month.

A Sense Of Direction

When mobile navigation devices arrived on the market, they were viewed as a guy thing—it's a great gift for dad, but stick with cell phones and digital cameras for mom.

No more. Increasingly, women also want GPS products. According to The NPD Group (www.npd.com), sales of mobile navigation devices increased 350% this year in the week leading up to Mother's Day compared with the same time frame a year ago.

To serve this growing market, Averatec has released its first handheld personal GPS device, the lightweight, portable Voya

350 (\$429.99; www.averatec.com). Microsoft Windows CE and a 300MHz Samsung microprocessor power the Voya, which comes loaded with NAVTEQ maps and street-level data for the United States and Canada. The database also includes 1.6 million points of interests, from businesses to ATMs, all in a 6-ounce package.

Input your preferences with the included stylus and the 3.5-inch touchscreen, and the Voya 350 will compute the best route to take to your destination, announcing turn-by-turn directions during the trip. So, whether you're heading for your boss's house for a holiday party, or an out-of-town arena for your son's basketball game, the Voya can lead the way.

When The Fun Is Done

The holidays can leave us exhausted but happy. When the fun is done, the CE devices we've mentioned here will carry you through the winter and on into spring. After all, the need for organization—for time, money, and help—knows no season. **FG**

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

shelf Watch

Westinghouse LTV-46w1 LCD HDTV
\$2,099 • www.westinghousedigital.com



Once you've organized your home and life, you definitely deserve a substantial reward. When you're ready to splurge on an LCD HDTV, we'd recommend the new 46-inch Westinghouse LTV-46w1 LCD HDTV. With its five HD inputs (including one HDMI input), you'll be able to connect gaming consoles, DVD players, and PVRs and view HD content in 720p or 1080i formats.



Great theater deserves a great setting.



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At first look, you'll be awestruck by the beauty of Sanus Component Furniture. Investigate deeper and you'll see the strength of aluminum pillars blended with the character of solid hardwoods and unique features like tempered glass shelves and a wire management system. Component Furniture includes cabinets, armoires and digital TV stands that configure to your exact needs. Add the Sanus Convection Cooling System that allows air to flow around heat-generating AV gear like a cooling canyon breeze and you have Component Furniture that echoes of quality and performance.

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www.sanus.com 800.359.5520

Fun On Family Vacations

Geocache With A GPS Device



eXplorist 400
\$199.99 • www.magellangps.com

W

hat do you get when you take cool gadgets, mix in a love of exploring, and add a large dollop of family togetherness? As more and more people are discovering, you get geocaching, a fun and addictive hobby that has grown tremendously in popularity since it first began in 2000.

High-Tech Hide-And-Seek

Geocaching is an activity in which you use a GPS (Global Positioning System) receiver to find objects, called caches, that people have hidden. Think of it as a geeky treasure hunt. A cache can contain, well, pretty much anything. Small toys, CDs, coins, books, jewelry, and other trinkets are the most commonly cached swag, though occasionally people have been known to leave more valuable items. At the very least, most caches contain a log book so that geocachers who locate it can record their names and the date they made the find.

Caches are hidden by volunteers who are often active geocachers themselves and want to help the activity grow.

When someone creates a new cache, she notes the coordinates and posts them along with a description and perhaps a clue on a Web site that tracks active geocaches. (The oldest and most popular geocache Web site is, not surprisingly, Geocaching.com [www.geocaching.com]). When you're ready to go cache hunting, you can search the Web site for caches near you, download the coordinates into your GPS device, and go.

It might not sound very challenging—you have the coordinates, so how hard can it be?—but the truth is that even the best GPS receiver will only get you within 6 to 20 feet of the exact coordinates, depending on factors such as the number of satellites visible to the receiver, signal strength, and atmospheric interference. And a good cache is well-

hidden so that hopefully only those who are looking for it will find it.

Here A Cache, There A Cache

Though you're sure to find plenty of geocaches in the great outdoors, along hiking trails, and next to big rocks by the ocean, you can also find them in very urban areas, indoors and out. Caches are hidden under park benches, in shopping malls, and on the top floors of very tall buildings. According to Geocaching.com, there are more than 300,000 geocaches currently placed worldwide; chances are good that wherever you are, a cache is nearby.

While it's great practice and a lot of fun to hunt for caches around your own city or neighborhood, one of the ap-

pealing things about geocaching is that it provides a ready-made family activity that you can include in family vacations with just a little bit of planning.

Jenn Donahue, a Seattle geocacher and mother of two boys, discovered geocaching while out in the woods with her family. "We had been hiking with our kids and ran into a couple that was looking for a cache. They showed us

Happy 'Cachers

Even the most theoretically fun family outing can turn into a nightmare if you're not prepared. Here are a few tips to help set you and your family on the right path.

1 Do your homework. Take the time to research the caches you plan to find, entering the waypoints into your receiver ahead of time and reading the descriptions carefully. This will help you know how difficult the terrain is or whether the cache is accessible only during certain times of year or at certain tide phases.

2 Bring supplies. Especially if you're out in the woods, make sure you have enough water, sunscreen, snacks, and extra batteries so that you don't end up thirsty, burned, hungry, or lost in the woods with a dead GPS.

3 Work as a team. With GPS in hand, even very young children can feel the thrill of following the arrow to the right location. Making sure that each family member gets a chance to lead, as well as a chance to make the actual find, will keep everyone involved and wanting to come back for more. ●

Learn The Lingo

As with any activity, geocaching has its own specialized vocabulary. Here are a few definitions that will help take the "huh?" out of your hunt.

Waypoint: Named coordinates. All registered geocaches are given a six-character waypoint to make it easier to enter and track on the GPS receiver.

Cache sizes: Micro, small, regular, and large. Part of a cache's description, the size indication helps you figure out if you're looking for something the size of a film canister, sandwich, Tupperware container, or 5-gallon bucket.

Cache types: Traditional, Multi, and Virtual are the three most common cache types. Traditional caches have a logbook and trade items. Multi caches are multistage searches in which the first part of the cache has a clue to the next part and

so on. Virtual caches are location-only, with no physical cache; often the owner of a virtual cache will ask participants to log the answer to a question online to prove that they've found the right spot.

Travel bug: A special kind of item you might find that needs to hitchhike from cache to cache. Sometimes it has a specific goal ("visit caches near all the major league ballparks") while other times it just wants to see the world. Travel bugs are imprinted with a number which is used to track its progress online at Geocaching.com.

Muggle: Adopted from J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, a muggle (sometimes also called a "geo-muggle") is a non-geocacher. Part of the fun of geocaching is being discreet enough to avoid the notice of folk who aren't in the know when you're looking for a cache. ●

eTrex Legend Cx
\$321.41
www.garmin.com



"My favorite thing is that it's an activity that requires us to work together as a team, and that we can adapt it to become more complicated as our kids grow older."

their GPS and explained the concept and it sounded like a fun way to keep our kids interested on longer hikes," she says. Now, two years later, it's become a favorite family activity, and on nearly every hike or camping trip, they plan at least a couple of cache hunts. "My favorite thing is that it's an activity that requires us to work together as a team, and that we can adapt it to become more complicated as our kids grow older."

Get The Gear

If geocaching sounds like something you'd like to try, there are a few things

you'll want to look for when buying a GPS device for your family.

A geocaching GPS should be handheld and waterproof. It should also have enough internal memory to store waypoints, as well as have buttons that are easy-to-navigate. It should have a relatively long battery life (around 20 hours). You'll also want a unit that can connect to your computer to download the coordinates of the caches you plan to hunt for, so

that you don't have to enter the information manually.

For a very affordable and well-featured starter unit, check out the Garmin GPS 60 (\$192.84; www.garmin.com). It can store 500 waypoints, has 28 hours of battery life, and a large, easy-to-read screen. The Magellan eXplorist 210 (\$149.99; www.magellangps.com) is another great inexpensive receiver with 22MB of memory, a large backlit screen, and easy navigation with a keypad and joystick. It also comes with Geocache Manager software to help you download and organize coordinates.

If you want something with a little more zing, Garmin's eTrex Legend Cx (\$321.41) comes with 64MB of removable memory, so you can load maps and use it for turn-by-turn directions in the car, as well as a color screen. Magellan also offers the eXplorist 400 (\$199.99), which has SD-card expandability for virtually unlimited map storage.

Whatever device you decide to buy, remember that the most important part of geocaching—family togetherness—is priceless. Happy hunting! 

BY KRISTINA SPENCER

shelf Watch

Canon PIXMA Pro9000
\$499.99 • usa.canon.com

Of course, your GPS device isn't the only thing you should take when you're geocaching. Make sure you bring a digital camera, too, and snap photos of the gorgeous scenery or the victorious moment your family finds a cache. When you get home, print the photos with the PIXMA Pro9000, which has an eight-color dye system and uses FINE print head technology. Our favorite part of this printer, though, is that you can use several types of paper and canvas, and you can make prints up to 13x19 inches.



tips

Protect Your Laptop Computer

1

Making A Case For Cases

Laptop bags are essential. That being said, laptop bags provide varying levels of protection. What may look great with your shoes may offer about as much protection as a moist napkin. Use a bag that is specifically designed to carry your size of laptop. Take advantage of straps, fasteners, and foam inserts to keep your laptop from bouncing around. Bags with hard walls can offer more protection but may be awkward to maneuver through a bustling airport. Also, avoid laptop bags that scream "I hold a fabulously expensive laptop." Timbuk2 (www.timbuk2.com) features a range of inconspicuous-yet-attractive handbag- and backpack-style laptop bags, totes, and sleeves starting at \$30.

2

Skins Are In

Laptop skins are great for adding some personality to your device, but the colorful adhesive skins can also protect your laptop's case from scratches, dust, and dirt buildup. Make sure to look for removable skins that are designed to fit your particular notebook model. When installing, make sure you don't cover any slots, vents, or other moving parts that you might need to get to. Schtickers.com and Skinit.com both offer a range of laptop skins in your choice of colors. These sites even let you design your own laptop skin.

3

Protect Your Screen

Is it any wonder the most vulnerable part of your laptop also happens to be the most expensive to replace? The laptop display is your window to your mobile workspace, so keep it clean and scratch-free with a screen protector. Radtech offers the ScreenSavr laptop screen protector (\$14.95 to \$19.95; www.radtech.us), which is an ultra-soft cloth that lies between the laptop's display and keyboard when the device is closed and acts as a screen chamois to remove scuffs when it's open. If you're looking to protect your privacy, you can pick up a 3M Privacy Filter (\$49.99; www.3M.com), which masks your screen when prying eyes attempt to view it at an angle.

4

Lock It Down

In this day and age, thieves seem to be willing to walk off with just about anything that's not bolted to the floor. To keep your laptop from becoming a "hot deal" in somebody's trunk, secure it to something a thief can't walk off with. Laptop locks usually fit into the standard security slot on most notebooks and include a heavy cable that you can wrap around an immovable object. Kensington (us.kensington.com) sells a range of key- and combination-based locks starting at \$29.99. If your laptop doesn't have a security slot, Kensington offers a Security Slot Adaptor free of charge.

5

Go Ahead, Forget Your Passwords

For most of us, the data on our hard drives is far more valuable than the laptops themselves. To keep potential thieves away from your sensitive stuff, use a biometric fingerprint reader. Some notebooks have this security feature built-in. If not, you can pick up a third-party, USB-based device, such as Sony's FIU-600 Puppy Fingerprint Identity Device (\$139.99; www.sony.com), to secure individual folders and hard drives and to manage Internet access. You also get the added benefit of never having to remember yet another password.



BY ANDREW LEIBMAN

music & movies

music

BY BLAINE A. FLAMIG

Beck

• Available: Now • Price: \$17.99

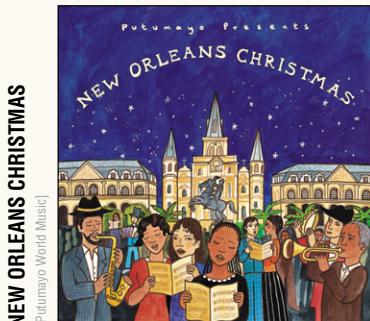
**THE INFORMATION**

[Interscope Records]

Whether you love, hate, or fall in the middle where Beck Hansen is concerned, it's difficult to divert your eyes from him. As eclectic, talented, and fearlessly experimental as any musician today, Beck is an artist's artist who doesn't limit his music to the CD. Instead, he moves his tunes into the visual and physical realms, as well. Take "The Information," for example. Beck's first album in three years. Beyond the CD's 15 tracks, Beck shot a video for each song while still in the studio (look for them on an included DVD and online), and he's packaging each CD with one of four sticker sets (designed by hand-picked artists) that buyers can use to decorate the album's blank cover with. In the hands of another musician, such tactics might seem like marketing ploys, but Beck's music has always been entirely unique, and his thought process entirely unpredictable. On "The Information" he teams again with producer Nigel Godrich (Radiohead, Paul McCartney), so expect plenty of mad-genius touches of hip hop, electronics, folk, rock, blues, country, and more.

Various Artists

• Available: Now • Price: \$14.98

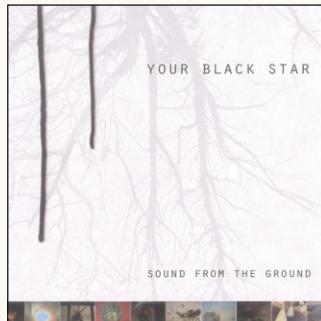
**NEW ORLEANS CHRISTMAS**

[Putumayo World Music]

"New Orleans Christmas" is the gift that keeps on giving. Putumayo World Music is donating a share of album sales to the New Orleans Area Habitat For Humanity to support the group's Musician's Village Project. Further, the Christmas classics are uplifting and spectacularly played.

Your Black Star

• Available: Now • Price: \$9.99

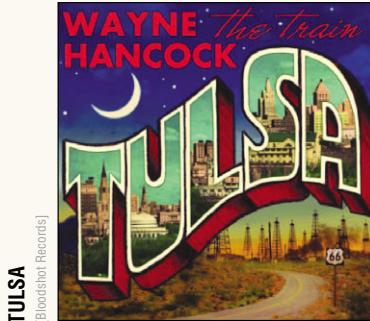
**SOUND FROM THE GROUND**

[Womka Vision Records]

If you didn't know better, you might suspect Your Black Star is a British retreat from 1985 rather than three Kentucky-born lads laying down seriously dense, ethereal, guitar-drunk songs in 2006. Think early U2 covering The Jesus and Mary Chain, and you have YBS's sound.

Wayne "The Train" Hancock

• Available: Now • Price: \$14

**TULSA**

[Bloodshot Records]

Bloodshot Records is the home to our favorite roster of musicians, and guys such as Wayne Hancock are why. A true road warrior who unveils his honky tonk magic live hundreds of times a year, Hancock and his stellar band will have you twanging, twirling, and twisting well past twilight on the excellent "Tulsa."

For The Kids: Elizabeth Mitchell

• Available: Now • Price: \$12

**YOU ARE MY LITTLE BIRD**

[Smithsonian Folkways Recordings]

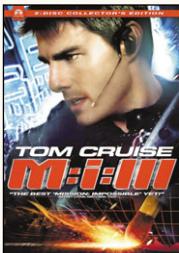
If there's a more peaceful, comforting way to send a little one off to bed than dropping Elizabeth Mitchell's "You Are My Little Bird" into the CD player, we're all ears. Putting her own spin on traditional standards and originals from Neil Young, Bob Marley, and others, Mitchell's tunes are warm, dreamy, and pillow-like soft.

movies

BY VINCE COGLEY

"Mission: Impossible III"

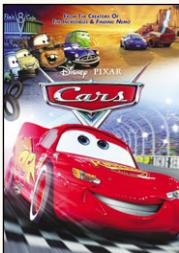
\$29.99 • RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE: NOW



When he's not accosting a sofa or introducing future Scientologists to the world, Tom Cruise ("Jerry Maguire," "War of the Worlds") still has time to make big-budget summer blockbusters. Regardless of his off-camera antics, Cruise shows there's plenty of life left in elite international operative Ethan Hunt, the film's main character. Philip Seymour Hoffman ("The Big Lebowski," "Capote") departs from his typical mild-mannered roles to play the main villain, Owen Davian, an international arms dealer. Hunt's superiors call on him to rescue captured IMF agent Lindsey Farris (Keri Russell of "Felicity" fame), and the rest of the plot essentially leads us from one action sequence to the next. Although it can't top the original movie, "M:I:III" outdoes Mission: Impossible II's overblown bombast and delivers plenty of terrific stunts. Ving Rhames ("Pulp Fiction," "Dawn of the Dead") returns as Hunt's reliable sidekick, Luther Stickell.

"Cars"

\$29.99 • RATING: G • AVAILABLE: NOW



Featuring the voice talents of Hollywood heavy hitters such as Owen Wilson ("Zoolander," "Wedding Crashers"), Paul Newman ("The Color of Money," "Nobody's Fool"), and Bonnie Hunt ("Random Hearts," "Cheaper by the Dozen"), "Cars" also calls on the voices of several racing legends such as Richard Petty and Michael Schumacher. Wilson voices Lightning McQueen, a brash, young racing car who grows tired of his loyal but smalltime sponsor, Rust-eze, and aspires to snare a sponsorship from Dinoco by winning the prestigious Piston Cup. On his way to the race that will determine who wins the Cup, an unforeseen accident lands Lightning in Radiator Springs, a backwater town on the verge of extinction. The

movie's heartfelt message and conclusion is terrific for kids, but its 5mph pace might have some young ones taking an early detour.

"Ghost Whisperer"—The Complete First Season

\$72.99 • RATING: NOT RATED • AVAILABLE: NOW

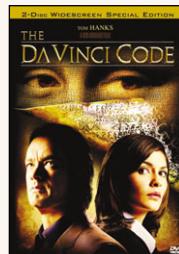


Thanks in part to its rather undesirable Friday night time slot, this quiet TV hit of 2005 may have eluded you. It's been a while since Jennifer Love Hewitt ("I Know What You Did Last Summer," "Heartbreakers") has graced the small screen in a leading role, but CBS's hit "Ghost Whisperer" proves she could be more

than a late-90s teen sensation. Hewitt plays Melinda Gordon, a newlywed who ostensibly winds up running an antique shop in a small town. But, as the title suggests, Melinda possesses the innate ability to communicate with ghosts who have unfinished business among the living; it might seem like a "Sixth

"The Da Vinci Code"

\$29.96 • RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE: NOV. 14



This is a flick that needs no introduction. Based on Dan Brown's staggeringly popular—and just as controversial—novel of the same name, "The Da Vinci Code" was a hit domestically and an international blockbuster. The shocking murder of the Louvre's curator draws renowned professor Robert Langdon (Tom Hanks of "The Green Mile" and "The Polar Express") and French cryptologist Sophie Neveu (played by French actress Audrey Tautou) into a web of mysteries and secret societies that span the annals of Western Civilization's history. Regardless of the film's presentation/interpretation of history, watch "Da Vinci" for what it truly is: a gripping suspense thriller. Hanks is passable as Langdon, but it takes sterling performances from Ian McKellen ("Gods and Monsters," "Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King") and Jean Reno ("Léon," "Ronin") to save the film from an otherwise pedestrian fate.

games



for you & the people in your life

BY VINCE COGLEY

Tony Hawk's Project 8

• PRICE: \$59.99 (Xbox 360)



Multiplatform

Grab your deck and prepare to K-grind your way through the latest skateboarding adventure from the pro of pros, Tony Hawk. With a goal of landing a spot on Hawk's own elite Project 8 team, the game throws more missions at you than previous Hawk titles. New features, such as Nail The Trick and Impress The Locals, keep the gameplay fresh and should provide plenty of appeal for gamers who are new to the franchise.

• ACTIVISION

• WWW.TONYHAWKSPROJECT8.COM

Viva Piñata

• PRICE: \$49.99



Xbox 360

Microsoft has finally listened to the collective clamor of piñata rights activists and produced a game that gives paper maché critters their due. Viva Piñata lets you choose from 60 animals to create custom, animated piñatas and watch them interact in a fictitious garden utopia. But as the steward of your creations, you'll have to keep them from fighting and the ever-present threat of breaking open.

• MICROSOFT • WWW.VIVAPINATA.COM

Yoshi's Island 2

• PRICE: \$34.99



Nintendo DS

Ever since Nintendo's green cartoon dinosaur became Mario's preferred mode of transportation, Yoshi's had a busy schedule, and his latest Nintendo DS adventure is no exception. With some assistance from Baby Mario, Baby Peach, and Baby Donkey Kong, Yoshi must investigate a mysterious island floating above Yoshi's Island. The action crosses both DS screens, and Yoshi's abilities change according to his rider; for example, Baby Peach uses her parasol to help Yoshi glide through the air.

• NINTENDO • WWW.NINTENDO.COM

MobileEdge SecurePack• WWW.MOBILEEDGE.COM • PRICE: \$79.99

Hands off! Some students we know are often so caught up in their conversations that they have no idea what's going on around them. That means pickpockets may have little trouble slipping iPods, cell phones, and other expensive gadgets out of the poor students' backpacks. MobileEdge's SecurePack (\$79.99; www.mobileedge.com) can help keep a thief from lightening the load. It has only one zipper, and that's under a flap next to the wearer's back. There's room for a 17-inch notebook inside, plus a pocket and headphone pass-through port for an MP3 player. SecurePacks come in black and urban camo.

**Pacific Design iPod nano Uptown Clutch**• WWW.PACIFICDESIGN.COM • PRICE: \$29.95

What does a woman with connections want in a wallet? Function and style. Room for plastic (the credit card kind). And a pocket tailor-made for her iPod nano, of course. Pacific Design (www.pacificdesign.com) offers real or mock leather Uptown Clutches in five colors, including Sky Blue, Jet Black, and Cherry Red. There's even room for her earbuds in a mesh pouch. At \$29.95, uptown style never cost so little.

AK Creature Furniture• WWW.AK.COM/CREATURE/CREATURE.HTML • PRICE: \$129.99

It's funny—everyone seems to know someone who would absolutely love a crazy chair like these. Game rooms, basements, and dorm rooms are all good habitats for a Yeti (white), Primate (black), or Mammoth (brown) Creature from AK (www.ak.com/creature/creature.html). These inflatable chairs have faux leather seats and removable ersatz fur coverings. Kids (and those of us who never grew up) love the idea of sitting on a big, fury Creature as they play Xbox 360 or watch high-def TV. On the other paw, the \$129.99 price is only slightly cheaper than a safari in Africa and a trip to the taxidermist's.



... & gifts

on the lighter side of technology

BY MARTY SEMS

Holiday Gifts For The Little Ones

When it comes to CE devices, why let the grownups have all the fun during the holidays? Here are our top picks for cool CE devices sure to be on every kid's holiday wish list this year.

computer microscope

Now the kids will intentionally find dirt.
www.playdigitalblue.com
\$79.99



ipod nano

No, you can't borrow it.
www.apple.com
\$149 to \$249



fly pentop computer

Because parents don't remember algebra.
www.flypentop.com
\$99.99



v.smile art studio

Much easier clean up than the wall.
www.vsmileshop.com
\$29.95



blue man group electronic keyboard

Full-body paint not included.
www.discoverystore.com
\$79.95

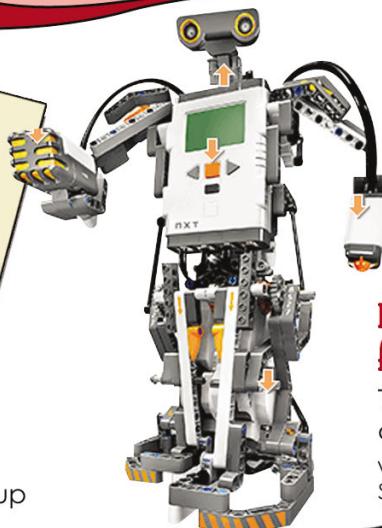


miflower mp3 companion

Who can't use a dancing flower?
www.discoverystore.com
\$24.95

kid-tough digital camera

She can finally document those big adventures she's always having.
www.fisher-price.com
\$70



lego mindstorms nxt

Maybe he can figure out the home theater system when he's done with this.
www.lego.com
\$249.99

mazu kan invisible fighting game

Thankfully, pretend fighting doesn't cause injury.
www.mazukan.com
\$59.95



american idol camcorder

A star is born.
www.playdigitalblue.com
\$79.99





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